

Self-Condemned

By Mrs Alfred W. Hunt.



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AUTHOR OF 'THE LEADEN CASKET,' 'THORNICROFT'S MODEL,' ETC.



A NEW EDITION

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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• Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.'

BEAUMONT.

SELF-CONDEMNED.

CHAPTER I.

'Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight!'

SHAKESPEARE.

'He never saw, never before to-day,
What was able to take his breath away,
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age
With the dream of, meet death with—'

R. BROWNING.

'If ever I marry, that shall be the woman!'

Such was the energetic exclamation which suddenly met the ears of a young man, who had for two hours been lying on a sofa reading Browning's 'Dramatis Personæ' in perfect contentment of body and mind. He looked up, feeling rather cross at the interruption: he saw his friend Lewis Barrington, who, a couple of hours before, had conjured him, for heaven's sake, to hold his tongue and leave him in peace, or a certain most promising article would assuredly not be finished in time for that week's *Spectator*—he saw this same man, who was usually sane and sensible, and endowed with a remarkable power of abstracting himself from the life that was going on around him—he saw him standing by the open window, eagerly looking through the sheltering screen of a white muslin curtain at something which was taking place outside.

'Do come and look at her, Frank!' again said Barrington.

'What is it?' inquired Frank, rather impatiently, for he considered this break in the serenity of the afternoon wholly uncalled for.

Frank Davenport had come to talk to Barrington about a magazine novel of his, which he was illustrating, but Barrington had been too busy to pay any attention to him; so the ill-used artist had taken a book instead, and for some time had been in a state of perfect sympathy with his poet, and did not want to be forced back to common life. If Barrington had got his article written, and had perhaps succeeded rather better with it than he had expected, was that a reason why he should thus disturb the blissful period of self-forgetfulness which his friend was so thoroughly enjoying? There

was no occasion whatever for him to unbend his mind in so ridiculous a fashion !

‘ Do come and look at her !’ again cried Barrington.

Frank Davenport, on the sofa, pretended not to hear. The other persisted.

‘ I won’t,’ said Davenport firmly. ‘ You say that you are going to marry her, so why should I disturb myself now ? I shall have opportunities without end of seeing her when you do.’

‘ You have no idea how much in earnest I am !’ returned Barrington. ‘ I have seen many a beautiful girl in my time, but none worthy of being mentioned in the same breath with this one.’

Somewhat moved by this—for Barrington was a man who had ‘ eyed full many a woman with best regard,’ and Davenport had always been obliged to confess that there was every reason for his so doing—the reluctant youth scrambled to his feet, went to the window, and, side by side with his friend, took his station behind the curtain, which enabled them to pursue their espionage undetected.

Barrington’s rooms were in a dull street in Westminster—a short street of dingy-looking, red-brick houses, some divided into offices, others occupied by persons of a certain position and wealth. Davenport had looked out of that window a thousand times, but had never seen anything to tempt him to look twice. To-day it was different.

Standing on the steps of the house immediately opposite, was a girl of eighteen or nineteen. The sun was shining down on her, yet she stood unbonneted and undaunted in the full blaze of its splendour. It sparkled amongst her soft golden hair, which was drawn carelessly back in wavy masses from a very white forehead. It heightened the warm colour in her cheeks, already perhaps somewhat heightened by the boldness of her undertaking—not that she showed any nervousness or haste ; on the contrary, she stood there in absolute confidence that whatever she did would be found right—and her eyes, whose colour could but be guessed at as blue, showed no alarm, but were brimming over with health, happiness, and perfect security in these and all other good gifts being hers for ever. Her nose was straight and well-formed, with a slight arch in it, which betokened strength of will ; her mouth and teeth were lovely ; but almost the prettiest part of her face was her chin, which was finely modelled, and showed the two dimples which are said to be beauty’s last perfecting touches.

Pretty as she was, she did not look as if she ever thought of her beauty, or of what impression she might be making on others. There she stood, on the cold grey steps, innocently unconscious that she was flying in the face of the established proprieties of life, and so thoroughly absorbed in the pleasure of what she was doing, that no other thought could find place in her mind.

Davenport was a figure-painter, and quick to see every detail

which made up the picture before him. Nothing escaped his eye, from the texture of her dress, which he did not like, to the pale pink coral necklace she wore round her throat, and the old-fashioned silver buckle which fastened her belt ; and yet he would have assured you that he had never bestowed a glance on these things, and had scarcely even observed the crowd of children which was clustering about her, because the girl herself was such a beauty ! What she was doing was this :

Princess Margaret Street, being narrow, was not much of a thoroughfare, and sometimes in the afternoon it was haunted by small children, some venturing to play with their tops or marbles, others tottering under the weight of extremely heavy baby brothers and sisters. The young lady on the steps appeared to have been suddenly inspired with a wish to make their eyes brighten with unexpected pleasure ; for she had come out with a large dish of strawberries, and, with her own pretty fingers, was giving each child one in turn. Her dish was all but empty when Davenport condescended to go to the window ; but he saw her at the top of the steps, and the children flocking round her, smiling their thanks as they received the bright fruit, craning their necks to peer through the open doorway behind her into a house which produced such wonders, or simply stuffing the delightful windfall into their mouths, and staring fixedly at the good genius who had bestowed it. She showed great impartiality in her gifts. Each child had its strawberry, and then the round began again—a calculation somewhat impeded, however, by fresh arrivals.

‘She really is an uncommonly pretty little thing!’ exclaimed Davenport.

‘A pretty little thing!’ echoed Barrington contemptuously. ‘Is that all you can find to say? She is not a little thing at all ; and “pretty”! She is smiling now ; but look what determination,—what character there is in her face ! She is divine, I tell you—magnificent and lovely at the same time ! What a noble figure, too ! and did you see her a minute ago, when she was waiting for that brat with a sack-like lump of a baby to go to her? She stood tapping the edge of the step with her foot ; and, by Jove ! it was the shapeliest little foot I ever beheld in my life ! She is very clever about distributing her strawberries fairly : she seems to know exactly which of the children has had one, and which not. Look ! that unfortunate child can’t get up the steps to her !’

A child on crutches had come to the foot of the steps : she was a late arrival. Quick as thought the fair maiden above saw her, ran down the five or six wide steps which parted her from the perilous publicity of the street, and picking out the finest strawberry in her dish, put it into the lame girl’s mouth.

The latter, a pale, sickly child of eleven or twelve, stood staring wistfully at the bright apparition before her ; she had often seen

great ladies roll by her in their carriages, looking rich, well-dressed, and beautiful, but she did not know that any of these splendid creatures ever spoke to poor little children like herself—much less fed them with their own hands. Was she perhaps dreaming now?

The lame girl's eyes were so expressive, that there was no difficulty in seeing what was in her mind. She did not thank her benefactress, but stood transfixed with astonishment and admiration. The object of her worship seemed to understand her thoughts, smiled, said a few kind words to her, and, finding that she had only half a dozen more strawberries in the dish, glanced round appealingly at the children, who had each had five or six, and said something which was probably to the effect that the last comer, being so lame, ought to have them all; after which, with an air of extreme decision, and a very kind smile, she popped them one by one into her mouth.

'I wonder how she will retreat,' said Davenport.

That was soon seen. She held up the dish—a choice old blue china one, with its pattern all blurred with pink stains—she considered its emptiness with an air of semi-comical dismay—waved her white hand, with its strawberry-stained finger-tips, and ran in.

Barrington stood for some minutes watching the house in silence. There was now nothing in its appearance to make it at all different from any of the other houses before him. All alike were as uninteresting as an equal amount of dead brick wall would have been. Then he said:

'Now I feel the truth of Wordsworth's lines—

‘“All Paradise
Could, by the simple opening of a door,
Let itself in on him.”’

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Davenport.

He thought it was time for the voice of reason to interpose.

'It's not nonsense! I tell you I intend to marry that girl!'

'I quite understand that a man can fall in love with any girl who is as pretty as that, and want to marry her—that's not why I said "Nonsense!"—but I do call it very absurd to fall in love with a girl who has no idea how to dress herself! I'd never speak to Nancy again—at least, I'd be very much inclined not to do so—if she came down dressed in a sparkling garment like that! A silk! A thing that won't hang in good folds! Barrington, did you—did you see it?'

'Yes; I liked it.'

'That's how she would drag you down, then! Her dress had all the ugly sameness of a large sheet of water in full light, or a big looking-glass with the sun shining on it! Come home with me, and I'll show you a gorgeous dress—one I bought yesterday for Nancy. She is cross, for she says she wanted to do something else with the

money ; but I should never have had such a splendid chance again, so I don't repent. It is silk of the most exquisite colour ! I forget its Indian name ; but "Ripples of Silver" is what it means in English. I'd have bought it just for the sake of its name, even if I had not liked it for itself ! And you should have seen the muslins that were offered to me ! With such names, too ! I couldn't quite buy everything ; but the names are a delight in themselves : "Woven Air," "Evening Dew," "Running Water ;" and the dresses were as delicate and beautiful as their names. I had to run out of the shop, or I must have bought every one of them ! Barrington, I don't believe you have heard a word of what I've been saying !

'I am almost afraid I have not heard quite all,' replied Barrington penitently. 'I was thinking of something else.'

He had not heard a word, but had been thinking that if this girl really did live opposite, he would see her again—might possibly see her twice or thrice daily. Then he strode across the room to some rather untidy book-shelves, and laid hold of a battered copy of the 'Court Guide,' to see if he could discover her name.

'Fifteen is the number,' volunteered Davenport, in a fit of sudden and amiable sympathy.

'As if I didn't know that !' growled Barrington. '15, Princess Margaret Street, Westminster. Cornelius Carey ; and he has a house in Scotland, too !'

'Cornelius Carey ! That's the Carey who belongs to Hackblock, Higgins, and Hackblock !'

'I am sure it isn't !' exclaimed Barrington, who could not believe that there was any taint of trade about the peerless maiden in the house over the way.

'Why should you be so sure ? By Jove, I can tell you that, so far as money is concerned, it's a mighty fine thing to belong to that firm ! The Hackblocks are all as rich as Jews ! I wish to goodness they would take me into partnership, and not expect me to do anything but draw the profits ; or, perhaps, paint them a good flare-up of an advertisement now and then.'

'What are they ?'

'Big blacking-makers. Celebrated ones, mind you ! Their names shine over the whole world with the effulgence of their own material,' said Frank. 'It must be a bore, though, to have to get all your effects out of one colour !'

'Black isn't a colour ; and you ought to know that !'

'What are you going to do to-night ?'

'Dine at the Wiltons', and think of my great discovery.'

'Now that that pretty girl of yours has gone in, couldn't we get through our business ?'

'It is too late to begin now ; besides, I have that bit of writing to finish.'

'I thought it was finished. What is it all about ?'

‘The wickedness of keeping sentinels on duty, hour after hour in severe weather, when they——’

‘Why on earth should you write about a thing like that? We ought to have sentinels—their dress is picturesque!—and the idea of their being there in all weather, and at every hour, is impressive! It is a thousand times better to preserve a picturesque grievance than to bring about a dull bit of paternal legislation. Barrington, you surprise me; I certainly did not expect you to take the commonplace inartistic side of a question. Alter your wording a little, and use your brains on the right side. You won’t—and you won’t see about those illustrations? then I’ll go back to Nancy. Stop, let me just have a look at myself first.’

So saying, Davenport strolled to the mirror over the mantelpiece and twisted his long, light-brown hair into some arrangement he thought more becoming.

‘How long you let your hair grow!’ observed Barrington. ‘They say one ought never to trust anyone with long hair.’

‘My tradesmen seem to have a great objection to trusting me,’ replied Davenport calmly. ‘They are wrong, though; they all get paid some day. Nancy sees to that.’

His hair really was very long, and immensely thick; it was of a warm brown, and without a trace of curliness. He was a good-looking fellow, with a somewhat massive oval face, large, fine, but rather immobile features, blue eyes, and almost womanly delicacy of complexion. He was tall, and could easily see himself above his friend’s goodly row of blue china plates and vases; but he was not so much admiring himself as a wonderful Liberty handkerchief, which might with equal propriety have been described as pink, red, or amber. Davenport was just going to ask Barrington whether, on calm deliberation, he would call it peach, or apricot colour, when he saw that his friend had betaken himself to his writing again, and was now working against time; so, hurriedly saying, ‘I’ll come back to-morrow, or next day,’ he departed; and soon afterwards Barrington began to dress for dinner.

He went to the Wiltons’, but found their party dull; and left early, on the plea that he had ‘a lot of writing to do before day dawned.’ He was known to be a literary man, so his excuse seemed to be a valid one; but he sauntered home by moonlight, recalling in imagination the face and figure which had made such an impression on him. When he entered his own street, he found it crowded with carriages; and when he looked at the Careys’ house, he saw that it had undergone a transformation since he went out. An awning now shaded the steps on which his fair maiden of the strawberries had so lately stood, light streamed from the windows, and the door was open to receive a number of guests who were doing their best to approach. This they could not do quickly, the street being narrow, and the number of carriages large. One by one these succeeded in

reaching the door and depositing their freight of pleasure-seekers ; and now that he knew where they were going, Barrington could not resist the inclination to stay where he was, and survey the faces of those who were about to enjoy a delight for the sake of which he would readily have foregone all the delights which were likely to fall to his own lot during the course of the next twelve months.

The Careys had on the whole a creditable set of friends. He scanned their appearance narrowly, and, to do so the better, he crossed the street and walked to the other end of it, inspecting each carriage as it passed him by. Just as he was turning back, still full of vexation at being debarred from the enjoyment of what he could have enjoyed so much, he heard a voice near him say, 'Mr. Barrington ! Mr. Barrington !' and turning quickly, he saw Mrs. Dalrymple, a great friend of his, struggling to push down the window of her carriage to speak to him.

'Isn't this dreadful ?' said she. 'What a block there is ! I am afraid I shall have to spend the evening here in the street ! I am on my way to the Careys'—so are you, I suppose ?'

'No, I am not. I don't know them. Tell me something about these Careys. I am suddenly interested in them.'

'Had you not better come into the carriage, then ?' said she, 'and I will tell you what I know about them. I am so glad I saw you : where shall I begin ?'

'At the beginning—the very beginning.'

'At the very beginning, then, Mr. Carey had not a shilling in the world.'

'May I make as good an ending !' said Barrington devoutly.

'Only the worst is, I am not able to tell you how to do it. I myself don't quite know how he became so rich—except that the Higginses and Hackblocks took him as their partner. He came from the North, and they say he was an office-boy at first, and then a clerk, and after that they made him a partner. Fancy, Mr. Barrington, he is actually a partner in that firm !'

To Barrington this did not represent quite so much as perhaps it ought to have done, but as Mrs. Dalrymple spoke in an awe-struck manner, he felt it right to be awe-struck too, and exclaimed earnestly, 'Is he really ?'

'He really is, and as rich as a man can be ! He married a friend of mine, so that's how I know so much about him. They have one daughter.'

'A—h !' said Barrington, breathing a long-drawn sigh of relief.

'Oh, of course, I knew that you were only asking all these questions about him because you had seen his daughter. Young men *are* like that ! Well, she is rather pretty, I must admit it.'

'She is beautiful !—no, that is not half strong enough—nothing is strong enough ! It's not her face so much—it is everything !'

'Yes ; she is not at all bad-looking,' said Mrs. Dalrymple calmly.

'She is an only child, and they idolize her. Mrs. Carey is a great invalid, and lies on the sofa all day, with a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. She worships this child, and Mr. Carey, who is much older than his wife, worships her too. She has never known what it is to have "No" said to her; and as for her father and mother, they are only too grateful when she expresses a wish for anything.'

'Not very good for her,' observed Barrington, 'or for her future husband.'

'No; indeed it is not—I often say so; but she is not much hurt by it. She says and does exactly what she likes, but her desires happen to run in a tolerably safe direction. Oh, how slowly we do get on! I've a great mind to give it up.'

'Don't do that. We are moving—but to return to what we were just saying, if they let her have so much of her own way now, won't that make it difficult for them to control her when she—well, when she begins to lose her heart? She might want to marry a poor man, or some other objectionable person.'

'Oh no! Besides, that is all settled.'

'Settled?' exclaimed Barrington, in much dismay.

'Yes; to the entire satisfaction of all her family—you know what that means, I dare say. She is going to marry a very rich man—young Hackblock, in fact—the only son of the head of the firm. It has been the dearest wish of her family for months, but she could not be brought to the point; now she has accepted him, and this very party I am going to is given in honour of the engagement. You know, he will be a millionaire, or half one perhaps—but here we are, at last! Where are you going, by-the-bye?'

'I? Home; there, that's where I live,' said he, pointing to the house opposite.

'Well, good-bye; I am so glad I happened to see you. You have helped me to tide over a very dull tract of time.'

He handed her out of the carriage; then, just as she was leaving him, he said, 'I wish you would take me in with you. Couldn't I go as a friend of yours?'

'Of course you could. Do come, if you have a little time to spare. I am intimate with the Careys, so there is no difficulty whatever about it.'

CHAPTER II.

'Hear my soul speak;
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service.'

Tempest.

THE thought must have occurred to everyone that if we had only our old schoolfellows to deal with in the battle of life, the said battle would be much easier, by reason of the perfect knowledge we should possess of all the combatants' characters. The man must be foolish

indeed who can be deceived by a school or college companion. Who can ever forget the mental as well as the bodily features of the first human being of his own level of age and experience, who 'licked' him in school, or out of it? Our boyish estimate of character, and our forecast of many a brilliant youth's career, may prove to be not quite right. Certainly it would not do to lose sight of the softening influence of time, place, and circumstance—it is strange, for instance, to hear of an archbishop having been fined when a member of the Oxford Union for disorderly conduct—but, as a rule, if we could get to know what was thought of a man by his own set when he was an undergraduate, we should have a rough sketch, which would require very little filling in with a few facts of after-life to serve as a perfect guide to us in our dealings with him. Nevertheless, there are some men who are a little more difficult to read from the very beginning than others—and of such men Lewis Barrington was one. 'Not a bad fellow, Barrington, I believe; but I could not make him out a bit at Baliol, and he has puzzled me ever since;' or, 'Not thoroughly popular, you know, but a man of first-rate ability,' would have been the summing up of our hero's character by nine out of ten of his old comrades at the Oxford and Cambridge Club.

'Time he made up his mind what he really intends to go in for,' would probably have expressed the practical view of his fortunes at the present time, which was taken in the same quarter.

Lewis Barrington was living by his wits, and he did not fare badly; for his wits were of admirable quality, and had not wanted any advantage of training or circumstance. His father had been a leader-writer on the staff of our greatest journal. He had just lived long enough to be gladdened by his son's success at college; and that success, of an only son, was the one thing which had brightened his life since his wife's death. He had lived extravagantly, and left his son little in the way of material aid, except a large circle of influential friends.

Lewis Barrington had qualified himself as a barrister, but, so far, had not shown sufficient devotion to the study of law to justify his warmest admirer in connecting his name ever so faintly with the chancellorship. But he had an assured footing on one of the leading journals—had written one play, at least, which was spoken of as a great success; and published a volume of essays, with the enigmatical title of 'The Open Secret,' which showed no little wit, and even some power of thinking. He had a very handsome face—a face with sufficient refinement in its strength to admit of his having been picked out to play the part of Cassandra, when the college was bent on acting a Greek play; and he had a well-knit figure, which enabled him to win a hurdle-race in the college sports of the same year. Of course, with his considerable gifts, he was a social favourite; but those who knew him best declared that there were strange veins of

contradictoriness and impulsiveness in his character, which made it impossible to forecast his career. Nay, that at times there were signs of a disposition to flout society altogether, and leave the beaten tracks which led to worldly success, simply because they were beaten.

Meanwhile, he was working hard enough ; and, like most literary men, lived a life which was made up of the extremes of solitary work and social excitement. It was therefore a very common proceeding for Lewis Barrington to go to two or three parties on the same night. He had left the Wiltons early ; but it was not far from midnight when he ascended the stairs of No. 15, Princess Margaret Street. A spacious staircase it was, covered with heavy Turkey carpets, and beset with flowering shrubs, hothouse-flowers, crowds of guests, and relays of servants.

Barrington was accustomed to lordly houses, but had no idea that No. 15, with its unpretending exterior, was of more imposing dimensions within than any of the houses on each side of it ; or even than humble No. 28, on the opposite side of the street, in which he himself found a shelter. He expressed his surprise to Mrs. Dalrymple, who said :

‘Mr. Carey likes building : there is a little ground at the back of this house, and he has used it to add room to room, so that his wife might not have to go up and down stairs, until the place is immense—for London, I mean. He has a charming place in Scotland, too. Poor man ! he took it to please his wife, and now she is not well enough to travel so far ; and, somehow or other, he can’t get rid of it. We are going there this autumn ; he has lent it to us.’

‘Introduce me to Miss Carey, if you can,’ whispered Barrington, as they approached the reception-rooms.

‘Yes ; but don’t forget that this party is expressly given to announce her engagement to Mr. Hackblock !’

‘Oh, you need not remind me of that ! Besides, she would never waste a thought on a poor devil like me !’

He said this in a hurried whisper ; for within the doorway he saw her standing by her father’s side, helping him to receive his guests, while hovering near her was a thick-set young gentleman, who looked more at home than Barrington cared to see ; and was, as he verily believed, no other than the hated Hackblock.

What a treasure of a friend Mrs. Dalrymple was ! In a most audible *sotto voce*, he heard her describing himself as a very great friend of hers—a friend of whom she was tremendously proud. Wonderfully clever ! Safe to make a splendid figure some day in the House ! Her husband, who was unluckily detained there at that very time by his duties, and thus obliged to lose their most delightful party, always said so—everybody was convinced of it ; and had Mr. Carey read ‘The Open Secret ?’ That was one of Mr. Barrington’s books—it was his last.

On this Mr. Carey, a tall, stout, and extremely pleasant-looking old gentleman, suddenly became quite effusive, and said that 'The Open Secret' was a book he delighted in; it had made more impression on him than any book he had read for years!

Hereupon the two gentlemen bowed profoundly to each other; and when the somewhat bald head of Mr. Carey once more rose erect, and the slight redness which had overspread his face from stooping had vanished, he warmly exclaimed:

'Mr. Barrington, allow me to introduce you to my daughter; she has read your book, too. Katherine dear, you have read "The Open Secret?"—I know you have. It is by Mr. Barrington. Tell him how much we liked it.'

Miss Carey bowed and smiled; but made no attempt to sound the praises of 'The Open Secret.' Instead of that, she looked up in some awe at the face of the author, and murmured some words which he could not hear; but the sight of her was enough for him. She wore an ivory-coloured silk dress, and some crimson roses; and somehow, for ever after, their scent intermingled itself with the thought of her. He could not have believed it possible for her to look more beautiful than she had done in the morning; but she did. There was a softness and sweetness in her eyes that was delicious! Was it—no! he would not for a moment allow himself to believe that any part of this charm was due to the presence of Mr. Hackblock. She spoke. It was only some commonplace remark about the weather.

Barrington felt as if he would like nothing better than to talk to her about the weather for ever. He could not, however, pursue even this harmless subject in peace, for people would come and speak to her every moment. One old gentleman, who had apparently just arrived, congratulated her on her approaching marriage with much kindness. Barrington saw her blush, until her face was almost the colour of her own roses.

'Introduce me to Mr. Roger, I beg of you, my dear,' continued this persevering friend. 'I take the very warmest interest in him already.'

'That's more than I do,' thought Barrington. 'I can see that he is an odious prig!'

For one moment he hoped that Miss Carey was going to stay by his side, for she evidently did not care to perform the introduction herself.

'Papa will do that,' said she; and then she watched papa and her zealous friend traverse together the yard of space which divided them from the hero of the evening, Hackblock.

Almost directly afterwards, however, she joined them, and Barrington lost his opportunity of saying more to her. He could not even have the pleasure of watching her, for a movement among the by-standers cut him off from the least sight of her. He withdrew

into a corner, and began to make careful notes of all he saw around.

The people were strangers to him, so there was no fear of being interrupted. He was glad of this, for though he wanted to improve his acquaintance with Miss Carey, he was especially anxious to learn as much of her and her family as could be gathered from a careful inspection of her surroundings.

Of these, Mr. Hackblock himself was the most interesting ; but as he, too, was lost to sight for the moment, Barrington contented himself with studying the people, pictures, and furniture. The people were neither literary nor artistic ; neither were they aristocrats. They seemed to him to be, for the most part, city folks, and all as rich as money could make them. The pictures looked as if they had been well chosen from third-rate exhibitions. The furniture was quietly handsome. It was manifest that either Mr. or Mrs. Carey had a certain amount of good taste. It was not that there was anything really good in the room, but that there was nothing strikingly bad ; and when a buyer has unlimited money at his disposal, that is saying a great deal.

Having made up his mind on these points, Barrington changed his place a little, to see if he could not find one which commanded a view of Mr. Hackblock.

What had the hateful Hackblock done to deserve the hand of the prettiest girl in London ? Barrington put this question to himself again, as he gazed at the stolid youth who stood there looking so thoroughly commonplace and so entirely self-satisfied. He was of the middle height, and of powerful frame. His neck was short, his head somewhat square and massive, being flat at the top, and covered with an abundant growth of dull-brown hair. His forehead was not ill-formed, but rather too low. His nose, a large and bony one, was slightly flattened at the end ; his eyes were of a cold unspeculative, unkindly blue-grey ; his mouth coarse and devoid of character ; his teeth good, but rather equine, and yet, with all these drawbacks, he was not altogether ill-looking. So far as concerned his character, the impression derived from a study of his face was that he was doggedly obstinate, but for the most part about trifles ; that he was one who would be content to dwell in decencies for ever, and not content unless all who belonged to him did the same ; that during the whole course of his life, which would probably be a long one, he would not only never originate an idea, but would be perfectly satisfied to adopt as his own the most commonplace ideas of the most commonplace people around him ; in other words, would go through life avoiding originality as he avoided poison or bankruptcy ; that he was one who would stoutly maintain that the dividing lines between genius and lunacy were so faint as to be practically non-existent—in short, he was one of the great army of Philistines !

Could this bright and beautiful Katherine Carey admire a charac-

ter of this kind, and even be one of the same mould? Barrington looked at her in utter dismay. Her face gave the lie to this mental accusation; but it required no denial—he had never believed it. As yet, however, he only knew her as a very lovely girl whom he had seen gracefully performing a kind action; but a very commonplace girl might have bethought herself that if strawberries tasted nice to rich girls, they would probably taste nice to poor girls also, if the latter could but have the chance of forming an opinion on the subject.

Of one thing he was quite certain as he looked at Mr. Hackblock, who was still standing near him; and that was, that if ever Katherine Carey took it into her head that it would be a pleasure to stand at the Hackblock front-door and distribute a dish of sovereigns to a group of needy outsiders, Mr. Hackblock, her husband, would promptly interfere. Money was a thing which he did understand. You could see, touch, and handle it; it could procure everything which the heart of man could desire, and was to be valued accordingly. He himself looked built up of money, as he stood there so erect, and so at ease. When he gave away any of that desirable commodity, it would be given in respectable five, ten, or twenty-pound notes to recognised charities worthy of such support; and having done that, he would cross off the item charity from his record of expenditure until the year following, and not give another thought to the needs or sorrows of suffering humanity, until the time came for signing the annual cheques.

Barrington watched him talking to one or two persons near him. There was too much noise to be able to catch much of the conversation, but it was easy to see that Mr. Hackblock himself attached considerable value to his own speeches. They were evidently the utterances of a man who had a formed opinion on every subject, and who would go through life without feeling one doubt or anxiety on any great question. The wisdom of the many—of the well-to-do many, of course—was his wisdom; there was no other. Persons who tried to upset established ways of thought—who started doubts likely to make others uncomfortable—were either madmen who ought to be shut up in asylums, or knaves who ought to be transported.

The only doubt which would ever give Roger Hackblock a moment's anxiety, would be whether this or that firm which had given Hackblock and Co. an order, was or was not trustworthy; and whether this or that promising investment was absolutely safe. The tenour of his life could be foreseen with perfect exactness. He would live and die a hard, calculating, obstinate, money-making machine. He would spend his life in adding to the large fortune with which he began it; he would be just, but not more than just; and sometimes so just that, viewed by a higher law, his justice would be cruel injustice. He would succeed in going out of the

world leaving more money behind him than his father would leave when he died ; but he would depart poor in all but money—with every higher aspiration starved to death for want of nourishment.

Was Katherine Carey to starve with him ? Was she a girl who would care to live the life this man would offer her ? Barrington might have pursued this train of thought much longer, had he not suddenly remembered, with some vexation, that he was wasting all his evening in forming speculations as to the character of Mr. Hackblock, and possibly losing his only chance of getting to know Miss Carey. Up to the present time he had, however, had no chance of approaching her, for she had been continually surrounded by friends. Now he saw an opportunity for saying a word or two. She was sitting on a sofa in a corner, and a lady to whom she had been talking for some time was just leaving the seat by her side.

He adroitly secured the place. Miss Carey smiled, and said :

‘Mr. Barrington, when papa told me I was to tell you how much I liked your book, I did not feel as if I could ; but I want you to know that my mother was delighted with it—quite delighted ! You don’t know how jealous I was of you when I saw how much pleasure you had given her ! I’d give anything to have the power of doing something she would like half so well.’

‘Don’t think me ungrateful for your pretty speech if I say that I am quite sure if you only walk through her room without speaking at all, you probably give her more pleasure than the best book imaginable could do.’

‘How do you know that, Mr. Barrington ?’ she inquired naïvely.

He smiled at her ingenuous admission that he was right. She continued :

‘You are quite right ! She is awfully fond of me ; but then, I am awfully fond of her. She is a great invalid, and has to lie on the sofa all day long. Think how dull that must be ! She has very few pleasures.’

Before Barrington could speak, the impetuous and impulsive young lady said hurriedly :

‘When some of these people have gone, you might help me to give her a very great one.’

‘A very great one !’ he repeated, wondering much what she was about to say.

‘Yes ; “a very great one”—a great pleasure ! Is my style bad ? You are an author, so I ought to be particular.’

‘Oh, pray excuse me !’ said Barrington. ‘You say that I can give your mother a very great pleasure ; I should be delighted if I could. What is it ? I hope it is in my power.’

‘It is quite in your power—it is easy ; it really would delight her. I’ll tell you what it is. Will you—after a while, you know, when there are not so many people here to miss us—will you go with me into her sitting-room ? She would so like to see you ; she always likes to see people whose books she admires.’

'But won't you be missed if you go away?' said Barrington prudently, remembering that she might be scolded by the powers that were, if she did this.

'Never mind if I am, if we give my mother a pleasure. I care far more for her than for all these people!'

He wondered what he was to understand by this. Was she including the Hackblock family amongst those she spoke of as 'these people?'

She saw that he was doubtful about something, and said:

'I shall not be missed—no one will notice that I am not here; and if they do, I can't help it! We must go; I may never again have the chance of introducing you to her!'

He looked at her with eyes which so plainly declared that he meant to see more of her, that if she had happened to be looking at him, even she, unconscious as she was, must have seen it. A minute afterwards she did look up, and exclaimed:

'Mr. Barrington, I can't help thinking that I have seen you somewhere before; where can I have done so?'

He smiled, and said:

'Perhaps in Princess Margaret Street; I live exactly opposite to you.'

'Really?' she said incredulously.

'Yes, really. You may have seen me leaving my own door.'

'Perhaps, but I don't think so, for I am hardly ever at that side of the house; I seldom go into any of those rooms. I stay in my own, or my mother's, and they all look out the other way.'

'You may have seen me when you were going out.'

'Oh, when I go out, unless it is in the carriage, I always go by a back way we have, which takes me into the park almost directly!'

'Then you never go to the front door?'

There was so much significance in his tone that she observed it, and looked at him with a pretty glance of surprise. He added:

'I saw you there this afternoon.'

'Giving the children strawberries.'

'Yes. I thought it so kind of you.'

'I did get so scolded about that!'

'Indeed! I imagined that you were a young lady who had all her own way.'

'So I have; but I am beginning not to have quite so much. Mamma said it was odd; and that no one else living in the street ever did such a thing!'

'That was not a very bad scolding!'

'From her it was. She never gives bad scoldings; but then some one else began.'

'Your father?'

'Oh dear no! If my father thought that it would please me to give the street-children strawberries, he would be sure to order a

ton of them from Covent Garden that I might have enough. It was not father—it was a friend of ours.’

Barrington was quite certain that she meant Mr. Hackblock ; but, of course, dared not assume that she did so, and had to content himself with asking what the friend said.

‘That nobody did it,’ replied Miss Carey simply.

‘But that was only what your mother said !’

‘So I told him.’

‘And what did he reply to that ?’

‘Oh ! he explained to me that a thing was not the less worth saying because two people had said it ; but the more, because it proved that there was twice as much truth in it.’

‘Then what the congregation says is worth more than what the clergyman says ?’

‘Oh, beautiful !’ cried she. ‘I’ll confute him with that ! That’s just the kind of argument that will do it. I know he is quite right about it,’ she added gently ; ‘I am certain of that ; only I do so like to do whatever comes into my head.’

Barrington was not satisfied with this return to allegiance to Mr. Hackblock. He tried to draw her on to say more, by adding :

‘I don’t think your scolding was very severe ; was that all ?’

‘Yes, I think so. No, it was not very bad ; but a little scolding seems very frightful when it comes from a person who is very clever. I really believe this one knows everything. He quite frightens me, he is so clever ; but I like it. Are you clever, Mr. Barrington—clever about botany—I mean at this particular moment, for I know you are clever ? Do you know that a strawberry is not a fruit ?’

‘Not a fruit ! Why, if it is not a fruit, what is it ?’

‘Ah, you are as ignorant as I am ! That’s just what I said when I was told that I was not to think that I had been giving those children fruit when I gave them strawberries, and that it was quite wrong to use the word ; for all that part which tasted so nice, and looked so red and ripe, was not fruit at all, but only the pulpy receptacle of a lot of small seeds, and the seeds were really the fruit.’

Barrington laughed gaily, and asked what she thought about that.

‘I don’t know what to think, and perhaps my thoughts don’t matter, for they won’t alter my feelings. You see it is the “pulpy receptacle” which tastes nice. I wish I knew half a quarter as much as he does, though.’

After a little more conversation, much interrupted by having to speak to others, she looked round and said :

‘I really think we might now venture to go to mother. Give me your arm as if you were taking me to another room, which, by the way, you are doing ; and, when once we are outside, we will go to her as quickly as we can.’

They crossed the room ; but, just as they reached the door, had to pass Mr. Hackblock. He looked as affectionately in the face of

his betrothed as it was in his nature to do, and Barrington had to witness the happy smile she gave him in return. Then they went out on to the wide landing of the stairs, where she opened a green-baize door, and, with Barrington, passed into a long corridor, lighted by a row of small lamps.

'Mother's room is ever so far off!' said she; 'she can't bear noise. She is quite away from the rest of the house—about as far off as one station on the Metropolitan.'

'Let us walk slowly, then, or we shall be tired before we reach the end of our journey.'

'Oh no, let us go as quickly as we can, for I know she will be so glad to see us.'

At the end of the corridor was another green-baize door shielding a door of more substantial make. Here Miss Carey paused and said, 'I will go first and prepare her for your visit. Do you mind waiting a minute?' She swiftly but noiselessly opened the door and passed out of sight, leaving him in that corridor which was undiversified by anything more grateful to the eye than a long length of Brussels carpet, so much sap-green wall-paper, and half a dozen small lamps on brackets. He had just time to tell himself that the more he saw of Miss Carey, the more he liked and admired her, and the more determined he was not to give up hope for ever, merely because she had just taken it into her head to think she cared for some one else—he had just time to assure himself that Mr. Hackblock could have nothing to recommend him but his money, and that there was no need of more money in a house like that, before he heard her returning footsteps. He opened the green-baize door for her, and thought she looked wonderfully charming as, framed by the dark doorway, she stood with a pleased smile on her lips.

'Come,' said she, and he almost fancied that she was holding out her hand in a frank little absent-minded manner to lead him in. He dared not take advantage of this gesture, which was probably perfectly involuntary on her part. When the last fragment of passage had been traversed, and Barrington entered the room beyond, he expected in some quiet corner of it to see a worn invalid with scarcely strength enough to smile a welcome. To some extent he was not deceived in his expectation. Mrs. Carey was extremely delicate-looking and fragile, but her appearance was so youthful that it seemed almost incredible that she was the mother of the blooming girl who had brought him thither. Her milk-white complexion, her languid eye, and wasted cheek, all told of years of suffering; nevertheless, she was beautiful, and even more beautiful than her daughter. She was thin, but there were no hard lines in her face—no signs of impatience or discontent. Her expression was sweet, thoughtful, and so exquisitely refined and noble, that it was almost impossible to see her without being spiritually the better for the sight. When Barrington bowed down before her it was mentally,

as well as actually. She was like some of the saints of the old picture galleries, who being dead yet speak. He took a place by her sofa. A table covered with books, papers, and work was near her ; she was evidently not an idle invalid.

‘My dear mother does not quite deserve the pleasure of seeing you, Mr. Barrington,’ said Miss Carey. ‘Don’t you think it is time for a delicate lady like her to be in bed?’

It was very late, and Barrington himself thought that there was a great deal of truth in this remark.

‘Dear child,’ said Mrs. Carey, ‘I can sleep here if I am inclined. I get dreadfully tired of bed. I like to look about me a little, while I can. Mr. Barrington, we none of us get enough out of this world—one half of our lives is spent in sleep, and the other, or at least a great part of it, in discontented weariness. I like to lose no pleasure that I might keep. To-night, by sending my maid to bed, and waiting a little myself for the chance of seeing my daughter, I have seen you as well, and I have so often wished to do that.’

She then spoke with great admiration of ‘The Open Secret,’ but though grateful to it for having procured him this opportunity of seeing her, Barrington was too honest to listen to her praise without much humble qualification of it. ‘The Open Secret,’ as he well knew, was a fairly good but not a great work. There was, however, no persuading Mrs. Carey of this, and he gave up the attempt.

‘Before you go, Mr. Barrington,’ said she, after a while, ‘do look at my little Turner. My dear husband bought it for me, and it is such a pleasure to me. Take the lamp, and look at it. I hope you will see it by daylight soon, but do look at it now.’

He took the lamp, and went to a splendid bit of Turner’s water-colour work. At another time he would have been quite absorbed in the delight of seeing it, but something else attracted him more now ; for as soon as he had left her, Mrs. Carey had turned to her daughter, and said in a voice which would have been inaudible to almost any ears but his, ‘Dear Katherine, have you been happy to-night ? Has he been nice ?’

‘He,’ of course, was Hackblock. Barrington tried hard to think it was himself, but could not.

‘Immensely happy, mother ! Far happier than I expected to be. After all, it is just as well to be engaged. I like people to make a fuss about me—in a new way, I mean. You all treated me like a child before.’

‘I was sure you would be happy,’ said Mrs. Carey ; then she said to Barrington, ‘Isn’t it fine ? There is so much poetry in it.’

‘It is beautiful ! I should so like to see it by daylight.’ For, in spite of Miss Carey’s words, he could not help wishing to come again.

‘I shall be delighted to see you. I was just going to ask you to come and have tea with me—come any afternoon you like.’

While Mrs. Carey was giving this invitation to Barrington, Miss

Carey was playing with a ring on her finger. She was sitting with head bent down, apparently oblivious of all else but what she was doing. She was gazing intently on this ring—sometimes at the flashing stones, sometimes at the plain gold of its hoop.

‘It is *the* ring!’ thought Barrington—‘the engaged ring! And she is turning it round to see how a wedding-ring will look on her finger!’ and, stung by the sight, he mentally exclaimed, ‘If ever that girl wears a plain gold ring on that finger, it shall be one which has been put on by me!’

CHAPTER III.

‘On th’ other part love so constrained him, that the power thereof surmounted both honour and truth.’—FROISSART.

NEXT morning Barrington drew his writing-table into a part of the room which commanded a view of the windows of No. 15. He wrote and looked across, and wrote and looked again; but never once caught a glimpse of the face he wished to see. The house was as dull and barren of all interest as a house could be. It seemed impossible to believe that only the night before, its rooms had been lighted up and doors flung open to receive troops of guests. Now it looked as if no one had entered it for a twelvemonth.

About five some callers presented themselves. At half-past seven a highly-varnished carriage deposited Mr. Roger Hackblock at the entrance. He was in evening costume, and was evidently going to dine with his betrothed and her family.

Barrington watched him make his way into the house, with the utmost jealousy; but, alas! that was all he could do. Wholly unfit as Mr. Hackblock was to enjoy such an honour, he had the right to enter that house when he liked; while Barrington himself was left out in the cold. It was in vain to dwell on this thought—in fact, it was impossible, for the sight of Mr. Hackblock in evening-dress reminded Barrington that he, too, had a dinner engagement, and little enough time to make ready for it.

Next day he wrote and watched as before. There were many visitors, but none of the inmates left the house, except Mr. Carey himself, who went to his office early in the morning. On the third day it occurred to Barrington that it might be well to make a little tour of discovery on the other side of No. 15, to see if he could find the door which was said to lead into the park so quickly. He went. He had counted the houses, so had no difficulty in fixing on the right door. It was painted a remarkably bright healthy-minded green; and just as he was standing by it, and thinking how Davenport would maledict such impiety in colour, he saw a slight movement of the latch, which showed that some one inside was touching it. The door opened, and Miss Carey appeared. She wore a fashionably made blue and white dress, which would have been an

offence to the artistic mind ; but Barrington thought she looked the picture of dainty freshness and sweetness, and so young that he could hardly believe she was the same girl.

When she saw him, she seemed much startled, but was too well-bred a young lady to show any sign of it beyond that one first glance of wonder. Then she raised her long eyelashes, looked in his face, and said :

‘Good-morning, Mr. Barrington. I hardly recognised you at first. I so seldom see anyone here whom I know.’

‘I had a few minutes to spare,’ said he. ‘I wanted a short walk, and hate walking without an object, so I thought I would just stroll round here to see if I could discover how you can get to the park by this way. You said you did ; but I could not recollect that there was any door.’

‘Papa had one made ; and I sometimes use it.’ There was a certain dryness in her tone that was far from encouraging.

‘I see you do. You go into the park by that gate, I suppose ?’ said he, partly intending to accompany her for a few minutes, if she said ‘Yes.’

‘Yes ; but I find that I have forgotten to put my dog’s collar on. I must go back for it. Good-morning,’ said she, summoning her dog, a pug of the most endearing ugliness.

This was anything but satisfactory, especially as, without the least hesitation in her manner, she actually did go, and shut the door behind her. While she was standing by his side, Barrington had felt himself basking in the sunshine of a sweet summer’s morning ; he suddenly found himself in a dull dusty road, unilluminated by anything. It was not the charm of her manner which had wrought the change, for her manner had not been particularly charming : it was her beauty which had done it ; and she was gone !

He felt very much disappointed and out of temper. He lit a cigar and smoked ; and as he strolled up and down, was half inclined not to sacrifice the pleasure of smoking, for that of walking for a few brief minutes with her when at last she did return. But though he decided in favour of waiting, and did wait quite three-quarters of an hour, she never came. That being the case, he thought he might just as well go home himself. He had a mass of work to do, and ought not to have come out at all.

When Barrington re-entered his room, he found Davenport there. He could not get on with his illustrations until he had obtained Barrington’s consent to a certain daring change of plan, and Barrington was always either too busy to talk, or out of the way.

‘Why, Barrington, where have you been ?’ said he. ‘I thought I might make sure of finding you at your writing-table at this hour !’

‘Oh, bother my writing-table ! I am not a galley-slave ! I can’t always be writing !’

‘I see you have moved it forward. You want to keep your wife,

that is to be, well in view ! Have you found out her real name yet ?

Barrington turned in amazement. For a moment he had forgotten that his friend did not know of the rapid advance he had made in his acquaintance with the young lady who so short a time before had, so far as his consciousness was concerned, been non-existent.

‘ Oh yes, I know her name ! I know all about her ! I went out to try if I could see her anywhere.’

‘ Then, my dear friend, you should have stayed in ! You should certainly have stayed in, if you wanted to see her. If you had been here half an hour ago, you would have done so. She came tripping down the steps, looking like an angel—or anything else of that superior kind you feel inclined to compare her with ! I saw her ! I watched her all the way up the street !’

‘ About half an hour ago, you say ?’

‘ Yes, half an hour ; or, perhaps, it may be three-quarters.’

Had Miss Carey come out this way to avoid him ? Barrington asked himself this, and looked cross and puzzled.

‘ It’s all your own fault !’ said Davenport. ‘ You might have stayed where you were, and then you would have seen her.’

‘ Confound her ! I can do very well without seeing her ! I don’t want to see her ! Come, let us talk about those illustrations ; horrible things most illustrations are, to be sure ! For one thing, the artists never think of reading what they are illustrating.’

‘ Poor devils ! I can tell you the artists who do illustrations are the best blowed-up set of men in London ! They read far more of the books they have to do with than the critics ever think of doing.’

‘ H’m !’ muttered Barrington doubtfully, giving this retort consideration, though he knew it was only aimed at himself.

‘ You seem to forget what awfully hard work it is to read people’s stupid books ! Don’t you get very sick of reading your own, when you have to correct your proofs ?’

‘ Oh, the proofs ! But that is not a fair test. Everyone gets sick of his proofs.’

‘ It’s quite a fair test. Your state of mind when you are going over your proofs for the second or third time—your boredom, then—corresponds with the boredom that I feel when I am going over them for the first. It’s precisely the same thing. Fatherly pride in the child of your brain carries you triumphantly through them for the first time, and even makes you think all you read very fine ; but the oftener you read them, the more true your judgment becomes.’

‘ Nonsense ! No one would ever publish anything if he believed that to be true ; but it’s not. How did you like the last number ?’

‘ Oh, very well ! It’s good—I don’t deny it. Let me read it over to you.’

‘ Read it over to me ! What can you be thinking of ? I have seen more than enough of it already !’

'There! Didn't I say that, after reading it once or twice, you were able to form a true opinion of it?'

'Do let us have no more of that rubbish!' exclaimed Barrington impatiently. 'You are sure that you saw Miss Carey go out about three-quarters of an hour ago?'

'Quite. She looked lovely! I have made a little sketch of her doling out her strawberries, and very well she "comes" in it; but do give your mind to those illustrations—this is the second time I have called about them, and I can't stay much longer.'

They were not long in deciding what they had to decide about the illustrations; and then Barrington discovered that he wanted some books of reference from the London Library, and went to get them. He liked browsing in a library, but had seldom time to indulge in this taste. To-day he told himself that he must not allow himself a moment; for it was his duty to go and call on Mrs. Dalrymple, to whom he feared he had been rather rude that night at the Careys'. Somehow or other, he had lost sight of her in the crowd, and had not taken much trouble to find her again. He got his books, and went to make his call, arriving at the house about three.

'You are just too late to see Miss Carey!' said Mrs. Dalrymple. 'She had luncheon with me. What, more London Library books! She had an armful, too!'

Then he had missed seeing her thrice that day! Once when she fled from him in the park, once in the London Library, and a third time at Mrs. Dalrymple's.

'I wish I had come earlier!' said he regretfully.

He made his apologies, but Mrs. Dalrymple had forgotten to take anything amiss, and said:

'I expected you to be absorbed in your admiration of your hostess. Isn't she a pretty girl?'

'Yes; but as you always say to me, don't forget that she is engaged to be married!'

'And likely to continue so for some time,' said Mrs. Dalrymple. 'At least, I can't help hoping so; for the wedding is not to take place while her mother lives.'

Barrington looked up in surprise; Mrs. Dalrymple said:

'Her poor mother has a mortal disease. The doctors do not give her more than twelve months of life; and she has begged to be allowed to keep her daughter as long as she lives. One can't wonder at her; but I should not like to do it if I were in her place, for I should always be afraid that Mr. Hackblock was wishing for my death. I couldn't stand that.'

Barrington's heart gave a great leap: if that marriage were deferred for a year, or a year and a half, it might never take place at all. Surely Miss Carey could not be so long engaged to that man without finding herself wholly unsuited to him?

'Are you invited to the haymaking-party?' asked Mrs. Dalrymple.

‘No, I am not invited to any party ; what is it ?’

‘Oh, by-the-bye, the invitations are not out yet ; but the advertisement is in the paper !’

He looked so curious, that she showed him a paragraph in the *Times* :

‘To farmers and others occupying land in a pretty neighbourhood within twelve or fifteen miles of London. Any person who has a field of grass ready for cutting by the 10th of June, and who would be willing to allow a party from London to make hay in it on that day, is requested to communicate with C.C., care of Messrs. Hackblock, Higgins, Carey, and Hackblock, Walbrook, London. Liberal payment will be given. Liberal treatment will be expected. Rakes and other tools must be placed at the disposal of the party. N.B. The field must be pretty, as well as the neighbourhood.’

‘It is Kitty’s doing,’ explained Mrs. Dalrymple ; ‘she says that she is tired of garden-parties. She has persuaded her father to get up a haymaking-party. A troop of young folks are to drive down from London and take their pleasure in this fashion. She has devised a costume for the girls, and all are to wear it.’

‘Are you going ?’ asked Barrington.

‘I !’ cried Mrs. Dalrymple. ‘I am considerably above four-and-twenty—I am far too old !’

‘So am I then.’

‘Oh, you are a man ! As the girl said, “Women must be good-looking, but men need not, for they are so nice, anyhow.” Your age is of no consequence !’

‘It is a rather good idea for a party ; at least, I shall think so if she asks me.’

Unhappily she did not ask him. This haymaking *fête* was to take place on the 10th ; but when the 7th came, Barrington was still without an invitation. He had watched the house even more closely than before, but to little or no purpose. He had strolled in the park more than once in the morning, confining his rambles to the immediate neighbourhood of the gate he now knew so well. He had not seen Miss Carey. He had called on Mrs. Carey, but she had not been well enough to receive visits.

Barrington was not accustomed to disappointment. He had set his heart on seeing more of Miss Carey, and the difficulties which beset his path when he tried to do so, only made him more determined to carry his point. He was frantically desirous to go to this party, but it must be by her wish and her invitation. Mrs. Dalrymple no doubt could procure him what he so much wanted, but that would not be the same thing ; he felt as if all the pleasure of the day would be lost if he owed it to anyone else but Miss Carey herself.

The 8th of June passed, and Barrington was no nearer to the

object of his desires. On the 9th he had fallen so low, that he did not care how the thing was managed, so long as he received a line from some one who had the privilege of adding him to the number of Miss Carey's guests. At last he threw himself on Mrs. Dalrymple's mercy. He was writing a novel, he said, and wished to describe a scene of this kind ; it was the very thing he wanted, only he must study it from the life.

Mrs. Dalrymple heard him kindly and patiently, but looked at him with an air of some doubt ; possibly she felt she had no cause for alarm, for it is a fact that during the course of the evening he received the much-desired note.

CHAPTER IV.

'There be some sports are painful.'

The Tempest.

MISS CAREY'S *fête* was obviously intended for happy folks whose time was their own. The whole day was to be given to it. At half-past eight the party was to assemble, and drive while yet the day was young to Sunningford-on-Thames, where for an ample pecuniary consideration a pretty field had been secured. When Barrington entered Mr. Carey's house five minutes before the time appointed, two drags were already at the door, and carriages and cabs had for some time been depositing young ladies, dressed in linen of the most lovely and artistic shade of pink, with delicate white sun-bonnets poised on their heads in a way which was so distractingly becoming as to threaten the peace of all beholders. The hall was crowded with these dangerous young persons, and Miss Carey was in the midst of them gleefully completing her arrangements. The gentlemen were to wear blue blouses and straw hats ; but, man-like, they shrank from exhibiting themselves in any part of this costume until they reached the scene of their labours. No one had time to speak, except on business—at least, it was part of the day's pleasure to think so. Barrington leant against the Wardour Street oak-panelling, and thought it made an admirable background to the girls with their pink dresses. And what pretty girls most of them were ; but how transcendently beautiful amongst them was the one he liked best ! He did not usually admire Wardour Street oak ; but to-day he could even have made excuses for the large bronze trophy which, with its shield, sword, battle-axe, and spear, apparently grouped separately together, but in reality cast in one solid piece of metal, was set up on high as a decoration. A good many make-believes were to be found in this hall. There were wide-spreading antlers, belonging to noble animals which had certainly never been shot by Mr. Carey ; there were numerous portraits of dignified-looking persons, whom you were at liberty to consider as Mr. Carey's ancestors, all acquired by purchase ; and massive ancestral cabinets,

which were now the property of a man who did not so much as know his grandfather's Christian name. It had all been done by the upholsterer—there was no pretence about Cornelius Carey. Barrington watched him going from guest to guest, admired his genial kindness, and acquitted him entirely. With the exception of Mr. Carey and some middle-aged Hackblocks and Higginses, all the others were young. The young folks were joyous ; so, too, were the old ones, especially the Hackblocks and Careys, those of the firm with whom we are most concerned. Why should they not be so ? Business was splendid, and this marriage which had been so long desired by them was to take place—a day's pleasure was before them, and the day was glorious ! It was evidently going to be intensely warm, and all wished to lose no time in getting off, but Mr. Roger Hackblock had not come. Before many minutes had passed he drove up in a mail-phaeton, jumped down, and came in to try to persuade Miss Carey to drive with him.

‘Oh no,’ said she, in a whisper which was meant as an aside, but was easily heard by Barrington. ‘How can you ask such a thing ? I'd like it, dear, of course ; but I must go in one of the drags, and so must you. Do come in the one I go in. Now you are here, we can set off at once.’

She hastily began to choose the occupants of the carriage in which she herself was to go. Barrington placed himself so as to catch her eye, and held himself in readiness to clutch at the slightest hint of an invitation. While trying to make himself look as if he were just the kind of person who ought to be asked to make one of her party, he could not help comparing himself with a poor shipwrecked passenger, standing by the gangway, watching a handful of capable sailors manning a boat for a desperate attempt at escape, and knowing that his one chance of being included in the small band would be lost, if he showed the least sign of eagerness or weariness. Two drags were being filled at the same time—Mr. Carey was selecting the occupants of one, and his daughter of the other. To Barrington's alarm he saw Mr. Carey look at him with a flash of sudden inspiration in his eye, as if some kindly idea about placing him comfortably had just suggested itself. Trembling lest the old gentleman's thought should be to the effect that it would only be paying a proper tribute to his literary eminence to ask him to accompany the older and more dignified members of the party, he cast an imploring look at Miss Carey.

Miss Carey was too busy to pay any attention to looks. ‘Let me see,’ said she, ‘I get so confused ! I wish those who are going in my carriage would get in, and then we shall see how many more it will hold. I don't want to crowd it, but it is much more amusing when we are a large party. Will you get in, Ellen, for one ?’

While this was being said, Barrington's quick ears caught the ominous words, ‘Mr. Barrington, I want you to come——’ Mr.

Carey was the speaker, and the moment Barrington heard what he was saying, and recognised that the fatal lot was about to fall to his own share, he hastily turned to the young lady who had just responded to the name of Ellen, and offered to help her into the drag ; and then, placing his whole trust in the virtue of audacity, got in himself, sat down by her side, and began to talk to her with such energy that he thought no one would have the heart to tear him away from her. His device succeeded, the number was soon made up, and he breathed freely when Miss Carey took her place by Mr. Hackblock, and the carriage drove off. All the way to Sunningford, Barrington scarcely spoke to her. He barely allowed himself even so much as the pleasure of looking at her. He was driving in the same carriage—could hear her voice, and see her, if he raised his eyes—that was more than enough to make him happy. She was gay, and kind, and beautiful—more beautiful than he had ever seen her before ; her dress suited to perfection ; she was sitting almost opposite to him, and yet he had self-denial enough only to look at her at rare intervals.

It was twelve when they reached Sunningford, which was the prettiest village they had ever seen. The cottages were whitewashed, chequered by intersecting beams, and had red-tiled lichened roofs and low latticed windows, set in strange old-fashioned bays. Every house, too, had its familiar friend in the shape of some great honeysuckle, rose, or clematis, which spread long arms about it, and decked it most prodigally with flowers. The whole party left the carriages at the inn, and set out in search of the hay-field—that is, began to do so, for there was no tearing them away from the cottages, and no sooner was one of these pronounced the most beautiful yet seen, than a prettier still was discovered. ‘Oh come, my dear young people, do make haste,’ said Mr. Carey. But they had found the loveliest cottage of all, they said, where small white clematis blossoms covered the walls with a shining milky-way of faint white stars. ‘Come, come,’ said Mr. Carey. ‘The field we are going to is prettier still.’

The field, when they reached it, really was very pretty, and from it they could see the red roofs of the village, the grey church, and just one silvery bend of the river. ‘How lovely !’ ‘How truly delightful !’ exclaimed all, and stood looking about them as calmly as if there were no such thing as work or punctuality in the world. The grass lay ready cut for them in long swathes ; two tents for the haymakers, masculine and feminine, were set up in opposite corners of the field, in which the farmer, who had made all these arrangements, was now pacing discontentedly up and down, mentally maledicting fanciful fine ladies, who must take it into their poor, silly, empty heads to come all the way from London to his hay-field, for the sake of ruining one of the very heaviest crops it had ever been his luck to clap eyes on ! It ought all to have been spread out, to take the benefit of the sun, at least two hours ago.

The fact was, the worthy man wanted both to eat his cake and have it. He had, when he made his bargain, exacted almost the price of the hay, and had assumed from the first that the entire crop would be ruined by the young ladies' mismanagement. He began to think now, that it was a pity that it should receive any injury at all; but he had been so well paid that he dared not grumble too loud—not even when Miss Carey and her maidens lost one valuable half-hour in wreathing their sun-bonnets with wild roses and honeysuckle, while the gentlemen were in their tent putting on their blouses.

Even when that was done, they had all to be taught how to handle their forks and spread the hay; and none of them took kindly to their forks, but cried out for rakes, and said that rakes were in the bond, and rakes they must have! Being informed that rakes were never used at this stage of the proceedings, they cried out for them the more:

'They might or might not be used in country villages like Sunningford; they were always used at the theatre, and were much more picturesque than those ugly, dangerous iron-pronged things!'

The exasperated farmer, who had only lately come from a lonely farm among the downs of Berkshire, and had no respect for the theatre or anything else in London, grinned fiercely, and said something between his teeth which sounded like, 'Nonation Lunnoners!' but no one understood the import of such words.

'What's the matter, Mr. Dearlove?' said Miss Carey soothingly.

'The matter!' he replied angrily; 'the matter is that I be nigh caddled to death wi' zeeing my good hay a-spiling!'

'It shan't spoil! We will get to work. Working is a great amusement to us! You like us to enjoy ourselves, I'm sure?'

Mr. Dearlove scratched his head.

'Ees,' said he dubiously; 'Lor' bless 'ee, ees! I like 'ee to hev a bit o' vun; but I dwoan't caare vur zich spourts az thaaze! Let I send a few folk to help 'ee.'

'Oh no; that would spoil everything,' said Miss Carey.

'Auh, bless 'ee, then, get on! Uz may hev unked weather arter this.'

At last the young people got to work—not that the farmer would have applied such a word to their movements. The elders of the party stood about and pretended to criticize severely, but in reality were exulting over the dexterity, beauty, and grace of their own children; and for the hundredth time the Hackblocks and Careys rejoiced over the engagement which had made them so happy. To Mr. Carey, with his bright, genial-looking round face, it was easy to look happy; but Mr. Hackblock the elder was a grim, iron-grey-complexioned, shaggy-eyebrowed man, and it would have been absolutely impossible for him to make his looks correspond with his words. His wife, too, was as angular and stern of aspect as he.

Roger Hackblock looked square and dignified in his blouse. Katherine Carey told him that he reminded her of the woodcut of Henry VIII., in her first 'History of England.' He liked the idea. She herself tripped about daintily, but rather erratically, thrusting her fork into other people's hay for the sake of teasing them, or for the chance of saying a few pleasant words.

'How delightful haymaking is!' said she to Barrington, who edged his way nearer to her as soon as he saw that though she had begun to work by Mr. Hackblock's side, she was far too volatile to be kept very long in any one place. 'Isn't it pretty and nice?' she continued. 'But I can't think why the hay-makers we generally meet with do not dress far more prettily. You see, it is such clean work! There is no choice of spoiling their better clothes, if they do put them on.'

'Ah, Miss Carey,' said Barrington; 'I am afraid you know little of the hard realities of this world!'

'Don't say "afraid"! Wish me not to know them. Some people do go through the world knowing nothing but what is beautiful, and good, and delightful! Let me be one of those, if I can!'

He looked at her with some earnestness. Was this an instinctive cry for mercy? Did some secret consciousness tell her that he was one who would fain lead her to turn aside from the smooth paths of ease and safety into which her parents had guided her steps? He interrupted himself—her speech meant nothing particular—he was losing a rare opportunity, for no one was within hearing at this moment.

'Miss Carey,' said he, in a low voice, 'were you angry with me the other day?'

She blushed deeply, and said:

'What day?'

'When I met you at your gate, and you turned back? I am afraid I displeased you, somehow.'

'Oh no!' said she. 'It was not that.'

'What was it, then?'

'Oh, nothing! Nothing at all important, I mean.'

'Won't you tell me what I did?'

'You did nothing!'

'But there was some reason?'

She blushed again and looked confused—very much confused—and applied herself vigorously to her haymaking; then she said:

'I won't deny it, Mr. Barrington; I did not quite want to see you, then. Not for any reason which would annoy you, though, or make you keep away from me! Just for a silly reason which refers only to myself.'

'You make me more curious than ever!'

'I will tell you what it is some day; I can't now. I must go. I can see that both papa and Mr. Hackblock want me.'

'Oh no, they don't! They are only looking this way! They are not looking at you!'

'But I hope they do want me—about luncheon, I mean. If they don't, I must go and persuade them to have it at once.'

'I thought we had had luncheon!' said he, for there had been a very fair amount of refreshment taken in the carriages on the way down, and he did not see how anyone could be hungry.

'You surely did not think that that was going to be our luncheon? Mr. Barrington, I can give you no idea how hungry I am!'

Barrington pulled out his watch.

'It is about half-past one,' said he.

But there was no detaining her longer. She went to her father and made a piteous appeal, which caused him to hurry away to order luncheon. In the meantime she began to work again. She was now under the shadow of an old grey-green ash-tree, and its feathery leaves danced about in the light breeze, and let rays of sunlight through, which flickered on her pink dress and white bonnet.

Mr. Barrington was not the only one who watched her with admiration. Mr. Hackblock was working near—he was the only one who did work conscientiously; but every now and then he could not help stopping to look at her. She was his own, and therefore doubly beautiful. Once Barrington saw him take her ungloved hand in his, and scold her tenderly for working till she had made a blister on it. Pink figures flitted about; blue-bloused gentlemen applied themselves diligently to work and pleasure, and merry laughs resounded.

The farmer heard them go into raptures about the beauty of the day, the sweet scent of the honeysuckle, and the grace of the white-sailed boats as they glided by. He could have 'drattled' them all for 'finding so many silly things to waste their time on.' 'A pack of foolish boys and girls,' that's what they were! Now, for the first time in his life, he realized what his father must have felt when, in a certain year in the beginning of the century, he, in the press of hay-harvesting, had employed some of the many French prisoners who then abounded in the country. But when they came to the fields, instead of turning the fine weather to account as they ought to have done, they threw themselves down in the shade and declared that not one stroke of work could they do until that terrible sun had set. That was how his father had been served, and 'thaay wosbuds from Lunnon' were just as bad!

'Varmer' Dearlove he chafed, 'Varmer' Dearlove he raged; but there was no getting them to think of anything now but luncheon! He, too, felt hungry; it was an hour past his dinner-time—an hour sacrificed in vain! Home he went most ruefully. It was the finest day of the year, and these young folks were making him lose it. The young folks were as happy as could be. Every trifle amused them, and made them suspend what they were pleased to call their work.

'There's the cuckoo !' exclaimed one.

'Turn your money nine times, and you will be rich all the year,' said another.

'Count how many times he cries "Cuckoo," and then you will know how many years it will be before you are married,' said a third, and devoted herself to the task.

'Shall we ask him ?' said Roger Hackblock ; and then he remembered that they were not to marry in Mrs. Carey's lifetime, and was thankful his Katherine had not heard.

'Girls,' said Mr. Carey, 'do mind your work, and let that poor cuckoo mind his ! No wonder cuckoos never have time to build nests of their own, when girls make them spend all they have in answering love-questions !'

'We are working, father, and hard, too ; but we are hungry and tired. And look, with all our hard work, we have not done a quarter of the field yet !'

Luncheon was ready. It was spread under some trees ; and, with one consent, each implement of labour was cast aside, and all sat down as if they had had nothing to eat that day.

'How good champagne is, when you have worked for it !' said Katherine. 'I never was so deliciously hungry in my life !'

Everyone felt the same. Pigeon-pies and cold fowls disappeared rapidly ; so did tongues and lobster-salads, tarts, jellies, and creams. Champagne corks popped, gaiety increased. At last hunger was satisfied—no one could eat any more. Still they sat where they were, for shade was pleasant, and rest was sweet. After a long time, one conscientious person—not Mr. Hackblock, he was sitting by his Katherine's side, and felt that he had worked quite hard enough during the morning to be entitled to pause now—at last some one said :

'Don't you think we ought to go back to our work ?' but this was met by the unanimous answer :

'It's very delightful here.'

They sat where they were, full of lazy speculation.

'Which was the prettiest—the green of uncut grass, or the green of grass which has lain a day or two in the sun, and faded a little ?'

'Do the stems of water-lilies prolong themselves indefinitely according to the depth of the water, or is there a limit beyond which prolongation cannot go ?'

Such were the questions on which they idly exercised their minds. The village tower made a pretty feature in the landscape before them ; the village clock kept chiming the departure of profitless half-hours. Again a voice said faintly :

'Ought we not to go back to our work ? It is three o'clock.'

All agreed that they ought, but no one stirred. At this moment the farmer returned with a group of village folks behind him, whom he left waiting by the gate. He came up to Mr. Carey, touched his hat, and said :

'If you please, sir, axing your pardon, sir, but it seems to I that it might perhaps amuse thaay townsfolk of yourn, coming as thaay doos from Lunnon, and not being gied to such work, or 'quainted with it themselves, just to show 'ee what we doos when we maens work.'

Mr. Carey appeared not to understand ; the farmer continued :

'I hev fot a few of my volks ; I thinks to myself, that it'll plize 'ee to zee how thaay tedds a yield. Thaay're plain to look at, miss,' said he, now turning to Miss Carey, and glancing at the costume which was so distasteful to him ; 'but maybe thaay're more fittinger dressed vur the job than any of yourn !'

'But you don't mean to say that we are not to make hay any more?' she exclaimed, with a little flush of surprise and disappointment in her face.

'Well, ees,' replied the farmer ; 'I thinks you had a bout afore nunchin as willsar you the main of the day. Um do say as lookers-on zees most of the spourt ; so if you'll just be sitting down on that there bank and looking on, we'll try to put all in place.'

There was a persuasive twinkle in 'Varmer' Dearlove's eyes which showed that he had some hope of gaining his desire by means of fair words. The question was put to the vote ; and, after some hesitation, it was decided that, for the present at all events, it was pleasanter to look on than to work.

'Varmer' Dearlove was delighted. Half a dozen 'strong daughters of the plough' were summoned from their lurking-place by the gate, and they at once fell to with a will. There was no clamour for rakes now : the humbler fork was all-sufficient.

The farmer's face grew round and jovial, the party in the shade happier and happier. Soon it came to be recognised that nothing could be more delightful than to sit at rest and watch others doing hard work. No one handled a fork again ; and yet all through the lives of everyone present that day, whenever any of them spoke of it, it was as 'that delightful haymaking-day at Sunningford, when we all worked quite as hard as country people do ! How hungry our work did make us !'

About four o'clock, they collected a few sticks and tried to boil a kettle by a fire of their own making ; but even that was too laborious for them, and they decided that it was easier to have it done in the village. The dispersion of the party in search of sticks gave Barrington an opportunity of saying a word or two to Miss Carey—only a word or two, for whenever Mr. Hackblock left her, some one else was sure to take his place.

'You still say that you were not angry with me?' said he, while helping her to obtain possession of a lichened bit of an ash-bough.

'I am certain I was not,' she replied, but she was too much interested in what she was doing to look up, or she might have seen how anxiously he awaited her answer.

‘You might think I was taking a liberty in trying to discover how you made your way into the park?’

She slightly shrugged her shoulders, broke her ash-twigs in three short pieces, and said almost curtly: ‘Oh no, I don’t care about that; the park is free to all.’

‘But I don’t want to assert my right to frequent it, if I drive you away.’

‘You did not. I said so before. I went away for another reason.’

‘Have you ever been there since?’

‘No, but only because I have had other things to do.’

Barrington looked dissatisfied. Finally he said: ‘I am afraid that if by accident I should meet you again, the same thing would occur.’

Katherine did not know what to reply. She was wondering whether it would be proper to say that she had no such special hatred of her fellow-creatures, but she was afraid of him, and dared not speak at all. He did not seem to observe that she was making no answer. That surprised her. What was occupying his mind so that he did not miss her voice? She looked up quickly, and saw his eyes fixed on her face with such heartfelt admiration in them, that she could not but let hers fall in the utmost confusion.

They went home in the same order in which they had come, and as their carriages rolled away, ‘Varmer’ Dearlove, who was standing watching them, might have been heard to say:

‘Um be a lazy lot o’ volk! I’ll be blamed if this bean’t the last I’ll hev of zich wozbuds aaz thaay a-hay-spiling over I, or my name beant Giles Dearlove!’

CHAPTER V.

‘I see the right, and I approve it, too;

Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue.’

A FEW days after the haymaking-party, Barrington again wanted a book from the London Library. His work admitted of no delay, so he went off to fetch it. As he passed the back of the Careys’ house (he did not examine himself narrowly as to why he chose that way) he could not forbear lingering one minute near the green door by which Miss Carey was wont to appear. She did not appear while he was there. ‘So much the better,’ thought he, as he pursued his walk. ‘It is both weak and wicked to think of her! If I wanted to ruin my life effectually, I don’t know a better way of doing it. It was a vile trick of fate not to let me have a sight of her until it was too late! If I had met her before she engaged herself to Hackblock, I might have had some chance. It can’t be helped—it’s too late now.’ Barrington was not always so submissive. During the last few days he had been in many minds. Sometimes he had told himself that it would be a sin to let this engagement go on—that

she never could be happy with Roger Hackblock—that if she did break it off no one would be the worse—she herself would be happier—Roger Hackblock had no feelings to hurt, and her father and mother would readily be persuaded that whatever she did was right. On these occasions, Barrington made short work with the stings of conscience. He loved her so much that he could not give her up—at any rate, not without a strong effort to gain her. At other times he drew his writing-table back from the window, sternly resolving to make no attempt to see her again, for, come what might, he must do his best to behave like a gentleman. This was one of his virtuous days, and so strong was he in his good resolutions that he even took himself to task for having chosen the path he did in going out, and went home by another way. He did not at all like doing this, but persisted, and walked on quickly, without looking to the right or to the left, steadying his mind by arranging the heads of an article he was about to write. If she had not been arrayed in a dazzling white dress he might never even have seen her, but as it was, the brightness of it attracted him, and he perceived her coming towards him, walking briskly and joyously, and full of conversation, which was, however, only addressed to her dog. He raised his hat as she came nearer. Her dog ran up to him with some condescension of manner.

‘Cosette ! Cosette !’ cried Miss Carey.

Cosette was as one who did not hear. She was standing in front of Barrington, minutely scrutinizing his personal appearance.

‘Your dog is named after one of the sweetest heroines in fiction,’ said he, after the usual greetings were over.

‘Cosette is sweet,’ said she, ‘but I can’t read that book.’

‘Not read it ! I am surprised.’

‘It makes me cry so. Victor Hugo is too remorseless. When the poor grandfather’s chair was taken away from him it made me cry so that I could not be seen for hours. Do you think anything so terrible could happen ?’

‘Life has very terrible things in its keeping,’ said he gravely.

‘I suppose it has. Thank Heaven for letting me have a chance of escaping them ! I should make a very poor heroine. I am as weak as a woman can be !’

‘You don’t know what you are capable of until you are tried.’

‘Oh yes, I do ! I know I couldn’t bear real troubles ! Why, I cannot even bear a little contradiction !’

‘I can imagine that. But I fancy your life runs very happily and smoothly.’

‘Most happily !—perfectly smoothly !—always, excepting the one great sorrow that my mother is so delicate. However, I don’t believe that she is half so ill as the doctor says. He tries to frighten my father ; but that’s nonsense ! Still, I shall be glad when she is well enough to go about with me again.’

Barrington saw that Miss Carey was ignorant of the state of her mother's health. It was, perhaps, better that she should be.

'Mrs. Dalrymple told me that you had all your own way,' said he, smiling.

'I suppose I have,' she replied. 'They—that is papa and mamma—are very kind. They humour all my fancies, in fact ; all but one !'

'May I ask what that is ?' he said.

They were now strolling leisurely along the gravel walk. He was waiting eagerly for her answer. He had not long to wait.

'They won't let me be an actress ! I have been teasing them to do so for a long time ; but they think it dreadful of me to wish it. I suppose I have no chance now of getting their consent, unless we are beggared ; then, perhaps, I might be allowed to do as I like.'

'You would like to be beggared ?'

'Yes, indeed I should ! Both for the sake of being allowed to go on the stage, and for other things.'

'Do tell me in what way poverty could improve your life ?'

'It would be so nice to work for what one wants. It is so stupid when you want anything just to have to go and ask for it. There is no anxiety, or suspense ! Besides, when poor people ask for help, where is the generosity of giving them money when you have only to dip your hand into a great heap of it ? I don't mean that I have a great heap, for I haven't ; but, then, I have only to ask papa, and that comes to the same thing.'

'Do you often go to the theatre ?'

'Yes, often. We are going to the opera to-night, to hear Carmen. I don't like Carmen. It is so stupid of that man to wreck his whole life for the sake of a woman not worth a thought ! I can't imagine how people can be so stupid !'

'So stupid as to do what ?' said Barrington, anxious to make her declare herself more fully.

'So stupid as to ruin their lives by caring for people whom they must know they ought not to care for ! I dare say people make mistakes sometimes ; but what is the use of having fathers and mothers, if people——' Here Miss Carey interrupted herself, and exclaimed : 'Oh, I have used the word "people" far too often in my speech ! Have you the least idea what I mean, for I don't seem able to make myself clear ?'

'You mean that you can't understand why young men and women do not profit by the wisdom of their ancestors, and give up caring for their lovers when their fathers or mothers tell them that they have chosen ill ?'

'Yes. I think it is very idiotic not to listen to the parents or guardians. They must know best ! Besides, no doubt they give some reason for their opinion. It is most senseless and unreasonable not to obey them !'

Barrington was wicked enough to be delighted with these senti-

ments. Every word which proceeded from Miss Carey's mouth showed him as plainly as words could do, that not only had she not given her heart to Mr. Hackblock, but that she was as yet entirely unaware that she had one to give. He thought for a minute, and said, with some earnestness :

'I am very much afraid that when I fall in love with any one, it will be senselessly and unreasonably. No one shall ever part me from the woman I want to marry !'

As he spoke, his eyes were fixed on the gravel-walk below ; when he looked up, he saw that Miss Carey's eyes were scanning his face with curiosity and interest. She turned away with a slight blush. She had been detected while studying a type of character as yet altogether unknown to her, and was ashamed.

'Miss Carey,' he said, for a sudden recollection of former meetings with her had flashed into his mind, and brought with it a strong desire for satisfaction on a point which still remained obscure to him ; 'Miss Carey, do tell me why you turned back when you saw me the other day. Were you annoyed with me for being there ?'

'Mr. Barrington, no. Indeed, your being there had nothing to do with it—at least, not in the way you think,—I——'

'You promised to tell me why you did it,' said he eagerly.

Miss Carey blushed, then she said, 'It involves a little confession, but it tells against me, not you,—however, you had better know the truth at once. The reason I did not want to see you that morning was, that I was afraid if I did we might somehow or other get into conversation about that book of yours—"The Open Secret," you know—and I did not want to do that, because, to own the truth, I had not read it. It was in the house a long time, and I dipped into it, but it looked so stiff and so deep, and was so awfully learned, that I had no idea what it was all about and just left it unread.'

Barrington laughed heartily, and said, 'I do so sympathize with you ! I would not read it myself for the world. But you need not have turned back on that account.'

'I don't know—it is very disagreeable when things are said which one can't follow, and one has nothing to say. I felt very awkward when papa told me to tell you how much we all liked it.'

'You did not show it. I had no idea that you felt awkward. It's quite a mistake to think an author's friends ever read his books or do anything for them, but despise him for writing them.'

'Oh, Mr. Barrington, how can you say so ? That day when I turned back, I went to the London Library and got it.'

'Well, have you read it now ?' He said this to tease her, for he knew that she had not.

'Not the whole of it. I still think it stiff, but I am reading it.'

'Don't dream of doing such a thing ! It is rubbish ! It was written years ago. Don't read it ; read my new novel when it is written, or one of my plays——'

‘You write plays? oh, I had no idea of that!’ said she, at once warmly interested. ‘How I do wish you would write one for me—one that would be nice for me to act, I mean—that would be giving me the greatest wish of my heart. Will you?’

‘Most willingly.’

‘You really will? How shall I ever thank you enough? Fancy having a play written on purpose for me! I’ll get papa to hire a theatre for us. We will have such a beauty! How long will it be before you can get it written?’

‘I’ll soon write it, when once I have invented the plot—but I must have a good plot.’

‘Of course you must. Can you invent a good one by to-morrow morning?’ she added anxiously.

He laughed and said, ‘I am afraid not, but I’ll be as quick about it as I can. You will have to give me some idea, though, of the kind of part you want me to write for you—you see, it must be designed for you from the very beginning, and I should have to see you about it from time to time—we should have to consult together about all kinds of things.’

‘There will be no difficulty about that,’ replied she, but presently she added, ‘The only thing is, that I would rather not let any one know about it until we have got everything settled—when once all is settled I am sure papa will let me do as I like, but if I spoke about it now, he would most likely throw cold water on my poor little project at once.’

‘But does Mr. Carey dislike your acting so much?’

‘Papa? oh dear no! he very much dislikes the idea of my being a real actress, but he would let me take a part as an amateur as often as I liked if the Hackblocks didn’t make such a tremendous fuss about it. They think that all these professions by which you can make money, are only adopted by people who want to make it, and that it is awfully low to mix yourself up with such people, even if you only act for once in a way, as an amateur.’

‘But why should you mind what the Hackblocks say or think?’

‘But I have to mind. Papa would not allow me to do anything to annoy them, besides, of course, I don’t want to do so—however, I shall carry my point about this if we hold our tongues judiciously. I should like to study my part and choose the other actors, and know what theatre we can have and everything else, before I name it at home.’

‘It is much better not to say anything about it at present,’ said Barrington; ‘the project is so very unformed. We have not even chosen the subject of the play. Think over it a little, and I’ll do the same, and then perhaps we shall see each other again either here in the park, or somewhere, and can consult a little.’

‘Exactly!’ said Miss Carey, ‘that’s much the best way. Here in the park will be the best place. I always come out at twelve.’

Her complete ignorance of the world and her guilelessness made Barrington ashamed of himself. 'Have you lived long in London?' he asked, and the connection between his thought and his speech was so obvious, that the moment after he had spoken, he was afraid that he had done so too unguardedly.

Nothing of the kind seemed to occur to Miss Carey. 'My people have lived here for a long time,' said she, 'and so have I, but I don't know very much about London, or, indeed, about anything. You see, my dear mother has always been so ill.'

'But you have a great many friends.'

'Very few real ones. Mother could not make new friends—it was difficult even to keep those she had. When I was younger she very often could not see me. I remember so well how my days used to be divided into the days when mother was well enough to be talked to, and those when she wasn't. She used to lie in a darkened room on those bad days, and I used to sit on the stairs near her door, and all the servants had to move about on tip-toe.'

'But you went out of doors and saw things?'

'Oh, yes; walks in the park with a servant, and sometimes Mrs. Dalrymple took me out, and sometimes Mrs. Hackblock, but I was generally at school.'

This, then, had been her life, and when she came to woman's estate, her parents had persuaded her to secure for herself a rich husband, with rich and influential parents, and, perhaps, also, to strengthen some business interests, by promising to marry the son of the senior partner in the firm. Barrington breathed freely, and having heard all that she had told him, he at once stifled all conscientious scruples by the thought that Mr. Roger Hackblock was taking quite as much advantage of her inexperience as he himself was.

'Then we will meet here sometimes, and plan this play together,' said he; 'but we will agree not to mention it to anyone else for the present?'

'Indeed, we must not mention it,' said she; 'I should break my heart if the scheme fell through now that things have gone so far! Papa is angelic, but there is just the fear that he might refuse his consent for fear of shocking the Hackblocks' prejudices—that would be the only reason—he can have no fear of my wanting to go on the stage now!'

This allusion to her engagement to Mr. Hackblock, junior, fell with a cold chill on Barrington. She continued, 'We shall have a great deal to think about; the dresses will have to be planned and——'

'I shall leave that to you. No one could have chosen prettier dresses than you did for your haymaking fête.'

'Oh, by-the-bye, Mr. Barrington!' cried she, 'that reminds me; you have helped me with one thing that I was anxious about, per-

haps you can help me with another. Papa wants to have a portrait of me in that very dress, but does not know who would be the best person to do it. Can you recommend anyone? He only wants something to remind him of the day; but still, it may as well be good; don't you think so?

Barrington quite thought so, and what is more, he at once thought of the artist to do it. His friend, Frank Davenport, was the very man. He was full of genius, but as yet unknown to fame—a passionate admirer of beauty, and sure, with such a beautiful girl as a model, to paint a picture that would delight all who saw it. Barrington was very glad to be able to do this good turn to an old friend, and said warmly, 'I can recommend a friend of mine who will paint a beautiful picture of you; it is Mr. Frank Davenport. He is an odd fellow in some ways, but a splendid artist.'

'In what way is he odd?'

'In every way. Artists are proverbially unpractical; he is more unpractical than anyone I ever saw; but he is a good fellow, and his wife is quite charming.'

'Then he shall do the picture, and now that is so nicely settled, let us think a little more about the play. You must be sure to write a really splendid one! I shan't be satisfied unless it makes an immense sensation all over London! We must have all the newspapers full of its praises. What fun it will be to read of the thousands of people who have to be turned away from the doors every night for want of room! Make it full of original situations and delightful scenes, and don't let us have a single dull speech from the beginning to the end!'

Barrington drew a long breath of dismay. 'I'll do my very best,' said he. 'If ever I do anything at all well, it will be when I am working for you; but do remember—'

'It must be done well!' interrupted Miss Carey, with a pretty air of authority; 'but on that score I have no fear; the instant you said you would write a play for me, I knew I should have a good one! I am so happy about it; we shall have a splendid success!'

She was silent for a while, but she was evidently enjoying by anticipation the sight of a house crowded to the very ceiling. He thought things were beginning to have a very ugly side, so far as he was concerned. Not even to please pretty ladies can great plays be produced at will.

She continued:

'If only I could be as sure of my part being done well! It must be perfectly delicious to feel yourself able to drive out of the heads of a whole theatre-full of people every thought which filled them before you came on the stage!'

'You need not go on the stage to do that!' exclaimed Barrington. 'I don't think any one who—'

He was suddenly checked by hearing a voice behind them, crying:

'Kitty ! Kitty ! Do stop ! Why would you not look my way ?'

Mrs. Dalrymple was the speaker. Barrington and Miss Carey turned round in great surprise and saw her.

'Which was your way, dear ?' said the latter, with gentle and innocent unconcern. 'You may be quite sure I would have looked if I had known you were there !'

'That !' said Mrs. Dalrymple, pointing to her carriage ; 'and I have been bowing furiously to you for the last five minutes. What can you be talking about that is so interesting ?'

'Oh, do let me tell you !' cried the thoughtless young lady ; and then she remembered that her play was to be kept secret, and added, 'I am forgetting that I must not.'

Mrs. Dalrymple glanced interrogatively at Barrington.

'Don't tell,' said Miss Carey ; 'you know you have promised you won't.'

Barrington wished she was not such a child of nature, but could only smile and say carelessly :

'Oh no, I won't tell ! Mrs. Dalrymple, little secrets are sometimes treated with as much distinction as great ones.'

Mrs. Dalrymple did not speak. She looked rather cross. After a brief delay, she said :

'Kitty, I was just going to Princess Margaret Street. I wanted particularly to see you, but I should have missed you !'

'" Missed me !" No, dear, you wouldn't. I am only taking my usual little run with Cosette. You know I am always out from twelve to half-past.'

'Yes, but you are much later to-day ; and this is not the park in which you generally walk.'

Miss Carey looked around in amazement. In the excitement of a pleasant conversation, she and her companion had strolled on—had crossed two busy thoroughfares, and had finally arrived in Hyde Park just in time to meet Mrs. Dalrymple accomplishing her 'daily stage of duty.'

'It's half-past one !' said she firmly. 'Kitty, you had much better let me take you home.'

Barrington had no difficulty in perceiving that this speech, being interpreted, meant, 'You had better let me remove you from your present companion.'

'Thank you,' said Miss Carey ; 'I will go with you if you want me.'

'I do want you,' persisted Mrs. Dalrymple ; and all that was left to Barrington to do was to take the two ladies to the carriage, in which there was no room for him. But the impression conveyed by his dear friend's manner was that even if there had been a seat unoccupied, it would not have been offered to him.

CHAPTER VI.

'*Hamlet*. The play, that's the thing !'

'*Arcite*.

Speak truly,

Do you think me unworthy of her sight ?

'*Palamon*. No, but unjust, if thou pursue that sight.'

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

BARRINGTON went home on foot, but his mind was in such a pleasant turmoil—Miss Carey had been so charming ; his morning so delightful—that he soon forgot to wonder why his dear Mrs. Dalrymple should have taken the trouble to make herself so disagreeable. What were all the parents and guardians in the world to a man so thoroughly in love as he ? He did not feel as if he could settle down calmly to work. It was infinitely pleasanter to do nothing but think. Unfortunately, work was an imperative necessity. If he did not at once complete an article he was bound to supply, a hateful demon from Printing House Square would arrive and sit on a chair outside his door until exorcised by so much 'copy'—copy on which the jaws of the press would close that very night.

He sat down to write, and wrote steadily. Long habit had made him able to drive out of his mind almost everything but the subject on which he was pronouncing his emphatic dictum. It would be untrue to say that he never looked across to No. 15 ; for a good many thoughts of Miss Carey, and various matters relating to her, could be held in solution even with work such as he was doing. He knew perfectly well that Mrs. Dalrymple was still there—that she had sent away her carriage, and that she was in all probability employed in making Miss Carey promise never to suffer herself to be entrapped into walking with him again—he knew all that, and yet he poured forth line after line of highly creditable Queen's English, with quite as many ideas to leaven the mass, as any journal has a right to expect. Suddenly he caught sight of Mrs. Dalrymple crossing the street from the Careys' house to his, with a determined step, and purpose in her eye. She was coming to remonstrate with him—going to talk to him 'just as an old friend !' For a minute he felt he must escape, but a rapid glance at the situation convinced him that he had better stay.

She came in. 'Lewis Barrington !' she began—she really was a very old and intimate friend of his—'here I am ! I dare say you expected to see me !'

'When I saw that you were sending your carriage away, I thought you might possibly look in on me,' he replied, with a smile.

'Oh, you saw that ! How is it that you are able to see these things ? and why have you changed the place of your writing-table ? You need not answer me. I know ! I am very angry with you !—more than angry—disappointed in every way !'

Mrs. Dalrymple was a very charming woman of a certain age. She administered a severe scolding in such a pretty, affectionate manner, that there was no being offended with her, for she contrived to convey the impression that the sharper her words, the greater was her liking for the person to whom she addressed them.

Barrington never once thought of taking them amiss.

‘Before you say more,’ replied he, ‘tell me if you have been speaking about this to Miss Carey? Have you been scolding her?’

‘I began; but she is such a child! I have told her that she must not walk alone with you, or any other gentleman but one. I do not want to speak plainly to her if I can make speaking plainly to you do as well!’

‘Speak plainly to me!’ said he. ‘I ought to listen, and I will.’

‘You really ought! What I want to say, is this: if you go on seeing Katherine Carey in this underhand way—if you use the opportunities given you by her mother’s illness and by her own inexperience to pay court to her, either seriously or not seriously, I shall never forgive myself for having been the person who introduced you to her! I warned you at the time that she was engaged!’

‘You did; but am I doing anything so very wrong?’

‘That’s a question that can best be answered by your own conscience. Are you, or are you not?’

‘I have not made love to her! On my honour, I have not.’

‘But answer this: are you in love with her?—rather in love, I mean. Of course, I don’t expect you to be more than that after such a short acquaintance!’

Barrington smiled at her little system of weights and measures, but answered quietly:

‘I am rather—perhaps a great deal. You see, I am speaking the truth to you, so you may believe me when I tell you that on my honour I have not shown it.’

‘But how long will that last? She is very beautiful. Is it safe for you to be so much with her when you feel as you admit you do? You are certain to show it sooner or later.’

‘No, I am not; and if I did? Hackblock would hate her changing her mind; but no one else need be very much afflicted.’

‘My dear Lewis, how ignorantly you do talk! Her father would be inexpressibly afflicted—this wedding is the dearest wish of his heart. He likes the idea of his daughter being wooed as a great prize by the only son of the head of the firm with which it is his pride to be associated. Can’t you put yourself in his place and understand? He remembers his own humble origin, and what a rise it was for him to be taken even as an errand-boy into their office! Think what triumph he must feel now! This marriage will put the last seal on his success.’

‘Oh, yes, I understand!’ replied Barrington rather impatiently;

'but I really do not see why Miss Carey is to be sacrificed to a mere sentimental prejudice of her father's!'

'Sacrificed! Don't suppose that she feels herself sacrificed! She accepted Mr. Hackblock of her own free will—she likes him. She is perfectly happy in the prospect of her marriage; I never see her without hearing from her own lips how happy she is. You must have seen enough yourself to convince you that she is telling the truth.'

'Yes, I dare say she is tolerably happy, but she knows nothing of the world. She thinks she will get on with that man, but I am quite sure she won't.'

'My dear friend, all this is completely beside the question; it is not your business to prove to her that she has chosen ill. It would be wicked to unsettle her mind! Are you going to behave well about this, or are you not? The girl is engaged and happy; her parents are delighted with the existing state of things. Is all to come to an end because I most unluckily introduced to them a man who seems inclined to be selfish and—excuse my saying it—dishonourable? You must pardon me for speaking so plainly.'

'You do right to speak plainly; I respect you for it. You are not saying one word to me that I have not repeatedly said to myself. I can assure you of that. You might have said much more than you have if you had not kindly wished to spare me. One glance round this poor barrack of a room might have supplied you with arguments quite powerful enough to convince most men of the folly of thinking of a girl brought up as Miss Carey has been. What right has a fellow, who lives from hand to mouth as I do, even to think of her?'

'Oh, come, I don't know about that!' said Mrs. Dalrymple, who had a generous soul. 'I don't see why you should not have thought of her, and won her, too, if she had been free; but, unfortunately for you, she is not, and that ought to be decisive. Lewis, it will be anything but honourable if you persist in seeing her except in the presence of her family, in the same way any other acquaintance of the same standing as yourself might do.'

Mrs. Dalrymple's straightforward dealing effectually touched Barrington, and he at once answered impulsively:

'I won't see her at all! It is much better that I should not! I will avoid her altogether, I promise you I will; and, by-the-bye, you may as well know that our meeting to-day was accidental. I did not try to see her; at least, not when I did meet her.'

'Now you are behaving as I hoped you would; you take a great weight off my mind. As a first step, however, let me request you to wheel your writing-table back to its old place.'

Barrington smiled.

'Yes, I'll do it to-day; you may trust me. On my honour, I will keep my promise, and avoid her as much as I possibly can.'

‘Thank you,’ said Mrs. Dalrymple ; ‘ I will not interrupt you any longer. You forgive me, I hope ?’

‘There is nothing to forgive : you have always been a kind friend to me, and probably never kinder than now. You won’t say anything about this to Miss Carey ?’

‘I won’t, I promise you that. Don’t be uneasy about what I have said to her. I said very little, and I don’t think she understood that. Good-bye. I am so grateful to you, Lewis, for behaving so well. Good-bye.’

It was quite true that, when speaking to Miss Carey, Mrs. Dalrymple had not spoken half so plainly as she did when she confronted the male delinquent. On the contrary, her reproofs had been couched in such mild language, and the young lady herself was so entirely unaccustomed to disapprobation, that she failed to remark much that was said, and only received a general impression that Mrs. Dalrymple thought it unwise for young girls to spend much time in solitary walks with gentlemen. Miss Carey herself held this opinion, and was not in the habit of acting in opposition to it ; but so far as Mr. Barrington was concerned, she did not see how she could help doing so occasionally, for much of the success of the play, on which her heart was now set, depended on their joint efforts to make it good. She thought of nothing now but this play. She was deeply grateful to Barrington, and delighted with her own good fortune in having secured the assistance of such a genius. Her joy was short-lived.

Just after dinner a note was brought to her ; its contents were a cruel blow. Mr. Barrington presented his compliments, and was sorry to inform her that after mature consideration, he had begun to think that he would not be able to write the play about which they had spoken so recently, without a sacrifice of time which would materially injure some other work which he was pledged to finish by a given period. He therefore lost no time in informing her of this unfortunate circumstance ; and, while regretting his own disappointment, hoped that she would soon find some one who would do all that she wished much better than he himself could have done.

‘As if there were any chance of that !’ she exclaimed. ‘No, he promised to write this play for me, and he must write it ! People ought not to break such promises as that !’

She seized pen and paper, and wrote :

‘DEAR MR. BARRINGTON,

‘You promised to write a play for me this morning, and you really must keep your word. Do it at any odd moment. Of course, do not waste your precious time by giving much thought to it—I do not ask you to do that—but just write it when you have a few odd minutes left from your other work. If you will do this, you will please me more than I can say ; and you will do your

more important work no harm. The play must be written by you, and by you only, for I must have a good one.'

She signed her note, and sent it without an instant's delay ; and that done, for the first time in her life she went to one of the windows on the street side of the house, with a thought of Barrington in her mind. She did so wish that she could see him receive her note ; still more did she wish that she could be with him to influence his reply. He must say ' yes.' No one else could write that play as he could.

She could just see him. He was sitting writing by lamp-light. His table was now pushed back from the window, but that did not excite her wonder, for she had never consciously looked across before. The blinds were not drawn down ; she could see him indistinctly through the transparent white curtains. Her note was taken to him ; he looked at it for some time ; then he read it, and very soon she fancied she saw him take his pen to answer it. Before long she had this answer :

' Do not ask me to write your play for you. I could not do it at all without giving a very great deal of time to it ; not for worlds would I do it hurriedly or carelessly. I must deny myself the pleasure of working for you ; my duty lies elsewhere. I am bound to act as I do. I must complete the work I have undertaken, however much I may wish to throw it over and do what you ask me.'

' How can he write thus when everything is settled ? I wish I could see him ; there is something beneath this that I can't understand.' Miss Carey had a sudden idea. She ran to her father, who was sleeping in his chair in the dining-room.

' Papa,' said she, ' you said yesterday that I was to ask some people to dine here ; tell me who they are to be.'

' Oh, dear me, child, don't be in such a hurry ! another day will do very well for that,' replied a sleepy voice.

' No, let us settle it now. I am in the humour for writing notes this evening ; and, besides, we may as well get the thing arranged. Here, I have a note-book and pencil, and you have that treasure of a head of yours, so let us begin. It won't take a minute.'

Mr. Carey named eight solid and responsible city couples, winding up with Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock, and adding, ' and your Roger, of course—he will take you down, so our numbers will be exactly right.'

' Oh, but mamma may be well enough to appear, I hope, and there is Minna Blake—I want to have her. She won't be in town long.'

Minna Blake was an old school friend.

' But if you ask her, that obliges us to have an odd gentleman to

take her in, and I don't want to be bothered to think who it is to be—I'm sleepy.'

'Is Mr. Barrington odd enough?'

'Yes, he will do very well; now you had better go and ask your mother if to-morrow fortnight will do. Come, give me a kiss, and run away.'

To-morrow fortnight was a long time to wait, but that was the day Mrs. Carey chose, and Miss Carey sat down by her sofa and wrote the notes. She did not send Barrington's until next day. Half an hour after it had left the house an answer came. 'Mr. Barrington regretted that a previous engagement,' etc.

'I begin to think that he wants to see no more of us!' said Miss Carey to herself, and then she went off into a spare room which overlooked the street, to see if she could catch a glimpse of this young man, who apparently wished to put an end to his acquaintance with her. Without the aid of lamp-light she could distinguish nothing; besides, she herself was afraid of being seen. If once she could get speech of him, she almost thought she could persuade him to change his mind again; at any rate, she could perhaps do what was very important—get him to explain his strange conduct.

It was strange! It worried her, and she could think of nothing else! Mrs. Dalrymple had been trying to persuade Mrs. Carey to engage an elderly spinster lady of their acquaintance as a companion who would always be ready to go out with Katherine. She, however, had declined to be troubled by any such unwelcome attendant, and her mother had yielded, as usual; but there was always the fear that Mrs. Dalrymple would not let the matter drop so easily. If this Miss Baldwin's company were thrust on her, Katherine felt that she could have no satisfactory explanation with Mr. Barrington, and an explanation was absolutely necessary to her peace of mind. Every day for a week she went out punctually at twelve; punctually she paraded the gravel paths o'er which her feet were wont to stray, but no one was there whom she cared to see. Every day on her return she stole into the spare bedroom. Barrington had found that the white curtains interfered too much with the light, now that his table was so far from the window, and had drawn them back a little, and, day after day, she could see him sitting at his writing as if no human power could tear him away from it. 'He does not seem to trouble himself very much about my poor little existence,' thought she; 'there he sits and writes, and writes, and writes, and never once looks across! Well, I don't want him to look across,' she added pettishly; 'but he is very unkind—he must know that he has disappointed me most cruelly. I shall never be satisfied until he gives me some better reason for it than he has done.' She was deeply hurt by his conduct about the play, as well as by his refusal to dine at her father's house. This was the first time in her life that she had met with any opposition to her wishes.

She sat in a corner in her mother's room brooding over her wrongs, and yet annoyed with herself for not being able to forget them.

'You stay too much in my room ; you don't look well, dear,' said Mrs. Carey. 'Have you had your little run with Cosette ?'

Yes, Katherine had had her little run, and many little runs, but they had all been solitary ones ; and they might have been both amusing and useful if only that Mr. Barrington had come to help her with her play, as he had promised.

'I think it would do you good to go and stay a while with Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock—they have asked you,' said Mrs. Carey.

'I don't want to go,' replied her daughter.

'Don't want to be with Roger ?'

'I don't want to leave you—he can come and see me here.'

He did come. He brought bouquets and bracelets, and presents of all kinds ; he was attentive and agreeable in a bulky and important way, and decidedly very fond of his pretty Katherine ; but he was a trifle dull, and Katherine felt the dullness without being able to account for it. She never attributed it to him. She thought she herself was frivolous and not equal to him.

'Roger,' said she, one evening, 'you have often said that you did not like people who were not actors, to act ; but I do think it would be a great pleasure to you to see me doing it.'

'Doing what ?' said he.

'Acting a real play on a real stage.'

'Indeed it would not !' said he. 'Besides, why should you trouble yourself to do that when you can see the very best plays going, for a few shillings ?'

'But the joy of doing it yourself !'

'Joy ! It wouldn't be joy ! You would soon find that ! I shouldn't like to have a lot of people staring at you.'

'But if they stared at me admiringly, because I was acting well, and making them see things in the play they had never seen before ?'

'It's not your business to do that. Besides, what does it matter to us whether they see much or little in it ?'

'Think of the pleasure of interpreting a work of art !' replied Katherine.

'Oh, nonsense ! Leave that to the people who are paid to do it. You are far too good for anything of that kind !'

'Very good people do act.'

'I don't know that. Katherine, you are very persistent.'

'Is it wrong to be persistent when I am really anxious about a thing ?'

He hesitated, and then said :

'No, it's not wrong at all. It's quite right now.'

'When will it be wrong ?'

'When we are married.'

'Am I never to beg for a thing I want, then ?'

'You will then have the power of getting everything that you ought to want—everything that is usual—that people ever do want, I mean—without any begging.'

'But, dear Roger, supposing I have a great desire for something unusual?'

'Then, my dear little woman, the chances are that it would be a very bad thing for you to get your way about it; and a prudent husband would have to interpose.'

Katherine looked as if the discussion had not ended satisfactorily. Roger was not sympathizing enough.

'I suppose most men would dislike their wives acting?' said she, anxious to find every possible excuse for him.

'Of course they would! They'd hate it! It is vulgar; people of the better sort never do it—they never do any of these unusual things! You would not like it either, Katherine. I am certain you wouldn't. You only try to persuade yourself that you would like to act; or, if you really do wish it, it is only because you meet with so much opposition.'

'I think that is very likely true,' said she; but she did not mean what he did.

This suggestion, however, roused her to struggle against the possession which Barrington was taking of her thoughts. It was most absurd to think so much of anyone as she had been thinking of him! Roger was quite right. She only cared for this because everyone was so determined that she should not have her own way about it.

CHAPTER VII.

'Will fortune never come with both hands full?'

King Henry IV.

'My dear Barrington,' cried Davenport, as he burst into his friend's room one morning, 'I have come to see if you happen to have a few odd pounds that you could lend me. I am not a very desirable man to lend money to, I know; but I will return it very soon, on my honour.'

Barrington looked up; he was alone in his dull room, writing. He had done little else than write for many weeks now, and was heartily sick of the sight of the point of his own pen. Work had told on him; he looked tired and ill.

'Lend you a few pounds, my dear fellow?' said he. 'I'll do what I can; but at this particular moment there are not many pounds in this world which I can call my own. How many do you want?'

'Say ten! Ten will do for the immediate object which I have in view; but I need not say that I could readily dispose of a thousand.'

'And what object have you in view?'

'Work! I want to get a canvas, and some brushes and colours;

and—will you believe it?—that wretch Stimpson, though I have patronized him for years, won't let me have them unless I pay his bill, or at all events a part of it. "Settle his little account," he calls it, though it's as long as my arm, and has been running on for ages! It's too absurd of him! I have been asked to paint a portrait—a portrait of a young and beautiful lady! I told him that, and showed him a pencil-sketch I have made of her; but he is a brute!—a tasteless, inartistic brute! I don't believe he cares a rush what people put on his canvases, so long as he is paid for them!

'Is it Miss Carey's portrait that you are going to paint?' said Barrington, seeing a curious twinkle in his friend's eyes, which seemed to imply that he had an interesting secret in reserve, and suddenly remembering that he had recommended him as a portrait-painter to that young lady.

'Yes, it is Miss Carey; and I have seen her father. He came puffing and panting up the steep stairs to my studio, and he looked at the half-finished things I have lying about the floor and tables, and gave me a commission to paint a half-length portrait of her.'

'The deuce he did! And how much is he going to give you for doing it?'

'Oh, he knows what he is about! He made a business-like bargain. He "understood I was a young artist"—rather unknown, you know: and that kind of thing. It's astonishing how quickly the idea of profiting by that fact comes into these old gentlemen's minds. He offered me a hundred pounds, hoped I would accept his terms, and slipped an envelope with ten lovely five-pound notes into my hand, as a foretaste of what was to follow. As if I could possibly have refused when once my fingers had touched them! They were white and delicate, and crackling all over with youth.'

'But if he paid you half the price in advance, why do you want money now?'

'Because I regret to say that those five-pound notes are no longer at my own disposal. Money, my dear Lewis, is the most precarious of possessions! Bank-notes, especially, have a way of getting spent. I notice that a fiver just seems to flutter once or twice in one's hands, and then disappears. I never could get one to stay long with me! However, in this instance I am not the most to blame. I let that Nancy of mine have five of the notes, and before the day was over she had paid some rubbishing bills with them!'

'Ah, I understand. Your poor little wife thought they would all come to a bad end if she did not make some good use of them quickly.'

'I dare say she did, poor little thing! Well, I am glad I gave them to her. I am glad she had the pleasure of spending them. I wish I had not parted with those I kept in my own possession quite so quickly! At least, I ought not to say that, for I made a very good use of them.'

‘How did you spend them?’

‘I did not mean to spend them at all. I meant to let that colour-man have a look at them, to reassure him, and make him associate a moneyed feeling with the thought of me, and then to keep them all safely in my pocket-book for months. I thought if I did, it would induce a habit of saving, perhaps even of hoarding; and I actually was getting to feel quite like that, when I happened to go into old Zaccary’s shop, and he had the most magnificent bed you ever saw—all gilt dolphins and such-like monsters curling up their tails at the head and foot of it, and the most beautiful scroll-work I ever saw! Somehow or other he persuaded me to buy it. It is not a bad thing that I did, for you might search London from one end to the other and not find another like it!’

‘You gave the whole twenty-five pounds for it? What did your wife say?’

‘Oh, Nancy? Well, she cried an hour or two, and said she would not sleep in it, and that it was far too large for our room, and couldn’t possibly be got upstairs. But it did get up, with a good deal of taking to pieces, and she is going to sleep in it to-night—at least, I am.’

Barrington began to scold vigorously. He really did feel very cross with Daveuport for being so thoughtless. He was a man without a sixpence, and he was always doing idiotic things of this kind. Barrington scolded, but there was no making any impression on him. Artists must pick up works of art of this kind when they had the chance, he said; they were their stock-in-trade; Nancy might cry and Barrington might scold, but they would both be compelled to own some day that he had done right. He would paint two or three pictures in which this bed should appear as a gorgeous background, and then he would sell it to some great buyer for three times the money he had given for it. Meantime, Nancy would sleep in it, and sleeping in a bed like that was quite an education in itself.

Poor Nancy! How many such little bits of education she must have had in her short married life! Barrington’s heart ached when he thought of her. She was one of the sweetest women he had ever seen, and her husband was one of the most distracting of men. He was running over with ability of all kinds, if he would but work steadily, but so erratic and unthinking that there was no knowing what act of folly he might not commit. Barrington spoke seriously to him; Barrington spoke angrily. But Davenport could not see that he had done anything so very wrong, and the only idea his mind seemed capable of receiving was that it was important that some friend should lend him ten pounds.

‘But if I did lend you ten pounds, and you went off to Stimpson’s with it at once, you would be sure to see some cracked old blue-china teapot in some shop on your way there, and go in and spend

all your money in buying it. I don't trust you a bit. I will lend you the money, but I'll go with you myself and see you pay for the things, and see them packed up and sent to your own studio.'

'Oh, they are not to go there! Miss Carey is not coming to my studio to be painted. She is not in town. You don't seem to be so well aware of your beautiful neighbour's movements as you ought to be. By-the-bye, you have given up writing by the window.'

'Yes, long since,' said Barrington impatiently. 'I haven't time to think of things of that kind now. I haven't looked out of that window for weeks.'

'You have not! Why——'

'Oh, don't waste time in wondering at that!' interrupted Barrington impatiently. 'Let us go and get what you want.'

As they went—for Barrington still refused to trust Davenport with the money lest he went into a china-shop by mistake—the former said, 'By-the-bye, how does it happen that you are in such a hurry to get your colours and things when your sitter is from home? You won't get actually to work, I suppose, till she comes back, and that will not be before October or so.'

'I am to begin next week. Her people have taken a country house near Hazeldene, and I am to paint my picture there. I am to stay till it is done.'

'Extremely nice for you, young man!' observed Barrington.

'Ah, now at last you see the advantage of the material in which I work. You can write your sonnets to her eyebrows when you are a hundred miles off. No one would think of inviting you to stay there to do them.'

'I don't expect them to ask me there,' replied Barrington quietly.

'Don't you? Then you may as well know that at this very moment an invitation is probably on its way to you. Miss Carey was speaking to me of you the day before yesterday. I went down to Hazeldene just to see if I thought I could make a picture of her—her father wished me to go—and I did not like to say to him, "Oh, I know your daughter's face by heart; haven't I looked at her for hours together through my friend Lewis Barrington's hideous white muslin window-curtains!" Why do you have such abominable things as those curtains in your room, Barrington? How can you live a day with such ugliness about you? Even I, who am a poor man, contrive to make my rooms look beautiful. You really ought to do something to yours. Now that we are out together, do let us go and choose some pretty ones.'

'Davenport, don't worry me about curtains, and don't be so parenthetical. Finish one thing before you begin talking about another. What did Miss Carey say to you about me the day before yesterday? I want to know.'

'She did not say much about you to me; she tried to get me to say two or three things about you to her; but I could not tell her

much, for somehow or other you and I have been too busy to see each other lately. I have been working at those illustrations. I only do them as pot-boilers, but I can't get on; and if they are not sent home in a fortnight, I shan't be paid.'

'Get them done, then,' cried Barrington; 'and for heaven's sake get your story done too. What did Miss Carey say about me? That's what I want to know.'

'How can I get them done? Am I not working like a galley-slave at them as it is?'

'I wish the devil——' began Barrington.

'Nay, the devil won't help me,' interrupted Davenport; 'I have heard of him stepping in to help an architect now and then, when the poor fellow couldn't get his work finished in time, but I never heard of his doing the same good turn by an artist.'

'Do you suppose that I was wishing him to help you?' cried Barrington impatiently. 'Anything but that, I assure you. Tell me at once what Miss Carey said about me.'

'Oh, nothing very particular, after all. She said she liked you, and that you were "nice to talk to," and so on; but that you did not like her, or something of that kind. You have refused some invitations, and have vexed her terribly, I think; but she told me you were going to be asked to spend a few days down at Hazeldene—next week, I think, it was to be.'

'Really?' exclaimed Barrington eagerly. His eagerness lasted only for one minute; then he remembered that however pressing the invitation might be, it was his duty to refuse it.

'Yes, next week. I am surprised you have not had the letter already.'

'I can't leave town for another month.'

'But it is August.'

So it was. It was the second week in August, and since June, Barrington had not once heard Miss Carey named. He had received her two notes, had answered both by a refusal, and had honourably abstained from walking in the park, or watching her movements in any way. It is said that virtue is its own reward—that the consciousness that he is doing right will enable a man to endure anything. Barrington was sincerely anxious to keep his promise to Mrs. Dalrymple, and still more bent on preserving his self-respect. He was behaving admirably well, but no day passed without his having to fight a hard battle with his worse self, which told him he was a fool to make himself so wretched—and that too, for a doubtful good—when perhaps he might be so happy. He was not reconciled to the loss of the only woman he had ever truly loved. He never would be reconciled. He wished Davenport had kept away from him. He could bear his lot more patiently when her name was never mentioned. Now that he had heard a little about her, he wanted to hear a great deal more, and to-morrow, and for many

to-morrows, the contest with his own inclinations would be harder than ever.

'How long were you at Hazeldene?' he asked, returning to this subject, though he did not know whether he was most wishful to talk of it or to avoid it.

'Two days; it's a very pretty place. You ought to see it. Go when I am there, and then it will be pleasanter for both of us.'

'How long are they going to stay?'

'Till October. Old Carey runs backwards and forwards to business. They have gone there on Mrs. Carey's account. She could not be moved far from home. She is an invalid.'

'I know her; I have seen her,' said Barrington impatiently. He was much irritated by Davenport's way of assuming that no one knew anything of the Careys but himself.

'The other partner—the big fellow of the firm—Hackblock—I dare say you have heard of him—is staying down at Hazeldene, too. They have a house there of their own. Stokesey Hall, that's the name of the place, and it's close to the house that the Careys have taken. The Careys have only taken theirs for three months.'

'What is the good of telling me all that?' exclaimed Barrington.

'I was going to tell you that Miss Carey is engaged to young Hackblock; he is the only son, and rolling in money.'

'Let him roll! I know he is engaged to her—I knew it long ago! What I want to know is whether she is in love with him or not; I mean, if her engagement makes her happy?'

'I am certain it does! He is a great rich stupid fellow, but she likes him.'

Barrington said nothing. Davenport continued, 'It is so disgusting to think of a man like that being able to go into a shop and buy all the lovely things which I have been coveting for years; but he cares for none of them! If you did but see the things he does buy! It makes me ill even to think of a bracelet he brought Miss Carey when I was there! It was as thick-set and massive as he is himself, and made up of ugliness and anachronisms! Well, she took it and clasped it round her pretty wrist, and wore it and smiled as if it were something quite beautiful. Yes, she must be very much in love with him to be blind to the horror of such a bracelet as that!'

'What nonsense you do talk, Davenport! What does she think of the man himself?'

'That he is a genius—those dull, silent, heavy men are always thought geniuses, for if they are not that, what are they? She never seems to think him dull. I used to see her walking about the garden with him for hours when I was at Hazeldene.'

Barrington had no inclination to say anything; Davenport continued, 'Oh yes, she's in love with him; I am sure you will think so when you see them together.'

'I see them together! I shall not be able to go to Hazeldene!'

exclaimed Barrington 'Of course I'll not go!' he said to himself. 'My promise binds me to stay away, but I would not go if it didn't. I don't want to see Miss Carey and her lover walking about gardens together.—I say, Davenport,' he added, 'talk about your wife as much as you can to Miss Carey. Perhaps, if you do, she may take it into her head to ask her down there for a few days.'

'All right,' replied Davenport; 'it would be delightful if she did. Fancy you thinking of that, old fellow!'

Barrington was always thoughtful for Nancy. His pity for her was only equalled by his admiration. Davenport, who was wholly unpractical and without judgment in all the ordinary affairs of life, had by some happy instinct contrived to pick out for himself a wife as sweet and good as any angel. She was not one of the characterless women whose amiability has its origin in indifference. She could even scold her Frank when his aberrations went beyond the limits of her powers of endurance, but whatever he did—and, as they say in the North, he really was 'a heavy handful'—she loved him, and sympathized with him, and toiled for him, just the same, and never ceased to believe him the most lovable of created beings. She had been looking very ill lately, but Davenport did not seem to observe it. Barrington had been uneasy about her for some time, and earnestly hoped that this invitation might be given.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Perhaps the smile and tender tone
Came out of her pitying womanhood.'

'Oh, Miss Carey, you will never persuade Nancy to say one word against Barrington,' exclaimed Davenport; and as he spoke he retreated a step or two in order the better to judge of the composition of the picture which he was now painting of Miss Carey in her hay-making dress. He had pitched his easel in the library at Hazeldene, a large room with a good north light, and with walls entirely hidden by bookcases full of old books, whose grave but rich bindings made a background which was a perpetual joy to the artist. Miss Carey was standing on an improvised platform at one end of the room, and never in the whole course of her previous existence had she submitted to so much discipline as she had done since Davenport had begun to paint her. She did not like having to remain so long in the same attitude. She found it most irksome to keep so still—thought that Mr. Davenport's talent ought to consist in being able to paint equally well whether she moved or not. She had never undergone so much constraint before, and never had such demands made on her patience. The only compensation she could find was in talking as much as she liked and making Frank Davenport and his wife talk too. For Barrington's little scheme had succeeded,

Davenport had spoken of his Nancy, and had told so many pretty little stories about her that Miss Carey had been seized by a strong desire to see her; and it is needless to say that she had only to express that desire to her parents to have it gratified.

Nancy had been at Hazeldene for a week, and to her it had been a week of entire happiness and freedom from care. She was a pretty, pale young woman when she came; she was a rosy and beautiful one now. Various benign influences had wrought the change, chief amongst which were rest and peace. She and Miss Carey were great friends, but now that young lady was doing something to imperil this friendship—she was saying that Mr. Barrington was fickle, changeable, and not to be trusted! That was why Davenport had exclaimed, ‘You will never persuade Nancy to say one word against Barrington.’

‘No, indeed,’ said Nancy, blushing with shame at hearing such hard words applied to such a dear friend. ‘No, indeed, Miss Carey, I can’t allow you to say that! I like Mr. Barrington better than anyone in the world except my own husband, and so I ought.’

‘Then you have not seen the disagreeable side of him,’ persisted Miss Carey, who could not forgive Barrington for behaving so strangely—not only had he broken his word about the play most disgracefully, but he seemed determined to go on being unfriendly—he, too, who had at one time been so eager to be invited to her father’s house! So again she said, ‘He has a disagreeable side, I assure you. I don’t like him at all.’

‘I do. He has always behaved like a brother to us!’ said Nancy warmly. ‘Hasn’t he, Frank? Do tell Miss Carey how good he is to us.’

But Frank was deeply engrossed by his work, and did not quite hear her.

‘He gets you work, Frank,’ said Mrs. Davenport eagerly. ‘He helps you in other ways; and he scolds you a little now and then, when you really do need a little scolding, dear.’

‘Oh, when he buys gold beds!’ said Miss Carey gaily; for she had been told of that.

‘I don’t want his scoldings,’ said Davenport. ‘Nancy thinks Barrington the best fellow in the world because he bullies me, and buys her bonnets.’

‘Nonsense, Frank!’ said Nancy, blushing; ‘how can you say that? But, Miss Carey, I don’t mind your knowing about it—I don’t mind it in the least. It is quite true; he did buy me a bonnet, and a mantle, too. He had heard from Frank that you had invited me here, Frank wrote and told him so; and, about an hour after I had got your letter, just as I was sitting with it in my hand, longing to accept your kind invitation, but not having the least hope of being able to do so—for, Miss Carey, Frank and I are dreadfully poor folks—well, just as I was sitting, ready to cry with vexation

at having to refuse such a delightful invitation, because my things were not quite nice enough to go from home in, Mr. Barrington came to see me ; and what do you think he wanted ? He said he had heard of my invitation, and wished me to accept it, and had been thinking that I might perhaps be shy of going from home without a new dress or two. He told me that he knew Frank always kept me well supplied with splendid Japanese dresses, but was afraid he would forget I wanted every-day things ; so he wished me to treat him like an elder brother of Frank's, and let him make me a present of anything I required. I am telling you this story roughly and clumsily, Miss Carey ; but he put what he said so prettily—just as if I should be doing him the greatest favour possible if I let him make me this present. He said he had made quantities of money by writing, but was so unhappy as to have no one to work for ; that Frank and he had always been like brothers ; and that if I would but do it, he would be able to write twice as well when he went back, for the thought that some good sometimes came of his work. I did not like taking this present from him ; but he seemed so hurt when I refused, and said that I looked ill, and that he had noticed I did for some time, and that, for Frank's sake, I ought not to neglect this chance of getting a little good country air. So, in the end, I accepted his offer, and took enough to get me all I wanted, and bring me here comfortably ; but I do think it was the very kindest idea imaginable—not one man in a thousand would ever have thought of such a thing. You may not like Mr. Barrington, Miss Carey, but I quite love him, and I always shall.'

Miss Carey felt a curious something in her eyes ; she surely could not be on the point of shedding a sympathetic tear ?

'I think it was very good and sweet of him to do it,' said she ; 'but it is sweeter still of you to tell it. A great many stupid, ungenerous women would have held their tongues about a thing like that, and not have named it for worlds.'

Davenport was very hard at work, but he heard that, and turned round to smile affectionately at his Nancy. There was nothing small or ungenerous about her, and he, too, loved her for telling that story—it never seemed to occur to him that it told a little against himself.

'Barrington is a good fellow,' said he. 'My wife is quite right. I ought to know what he is like—I have known him since I was a boy.'

Almost immediately afterwards he exclaimed :

'Miss Carey, you must excuse me, but that is not in the very least the position in which I placed you.'

'Will you place me again, then, please—I forget how it was ? It is horrible to have to—no, I don't mean that ; I like sitting, Mr. Davenport—don't think I dislike it. It is not being allowed to move about as I like that is so horrible ! Let me rest a little, and then we will try again.'

‘Not yet, please ; I am just doing something so very important.’

‘Then I’ll be quite still ; I want to think about something.’

Miss Carey, though she complained of having to remain in one position, never did remain in the same for two minutes together, and was the worst sitter Davenport had ever known. This speech of hers, however, sounded more promising, and he was hopeful for some time. She actually did keep perfectly still ; but, unfortunately, she looked sad instead of joyous, as she ought to have done. Her eyes were fixed on Nancy. The story she had just heard had touched her to the heart.

‘Turn your eyes this way, please, Miss Carey : and do be so kind as to put a little brightness and animation into your expression. You look at Nancy as if she had been treating you ill, and you were breaking your heart about it.’

Miss Carey could not help looking sorrowful. She had gathered from the story, which she had just heard, that Nancy led a life of some privation ; and it was evident that Mr. Barrington was anxious about her health, but that her husband failed to observe that anything was amiss with it. Nancy coughed sometimes ; and, now that this thought had occurred to Miss Carey, these coughs smote painfully on her ear.

Davenport never seemed to notice them. He must be blind and deaf to alarm on her account, or how could a man, whose wife looked as ill as Nancy did when she came to Hazeldene, spend five-and-twenty pounds on a bed with gilded dolphins, instead of taking her somewhere for change of air ? He loved Nancy passionately.

Miss Carey had never seen any husband and wife who loved each other as these two did. How dreadful if they were going to be parted from each other ! What if poor Nancy were in a consumption, and going to die ? Miss Carey was sure Davenport would die too if he lost her. Nancy looked so delicate ; her veins showed far too distinctly—they were as blue and clearly defined as poor Mrs. Carey’s.

Miss Carey sat gazing on her and pitying her, and making up her mind to be a good, kind friend to her. That story, which she had just heard, had taught her a lesson which she would never forget. She, too, would try to be kind to others, especially to girls who were not so well off as she was herself. Suddenly, in the midst of all these tender and compassionate thoughts, she became aware that she was driving her artist to the very verge of distraction. He was writhing with vexation, and seemed to be on the point of giving up his work altogether in despair. Nancy looked as if she longed to say or do something in his behalf, but was afraid of doing wrong.

‘Oh, I am afraid I am sitting very badly !’ exclaimed Miss Carey. ‘I do wish I were not so stupid about it !’

‘I am very anxious to paint something Mr. Carey will like,’ said Davenport gravely.

He felt that he had spent nearly five weeks in the house, and had only done one week's work.

'Oh, papa is delighted with what you have done! Besides, he will like any picture in which I figure as the model, so you need have no fear.'

'Yes; but it won't do for me to be satisfied so easily as that. I had hoped to do something I could be proud of! With such a model, I ought.'

'I'll behave better—I really will! I suppose I need not sit longer to-day, though? I am tired. Let us give up.'

Davenport almost groaned. Thus he was tantalized daily. She never gave him a chance! Nancy took courage, and came to the rescue.

'Miss Carey,' said she, 'don't be vexed with us, or think us unreasonable; let me try to explain Frank's feelings. He does not think it right to come here to paint you and do no work. It is not fair to your father. Frank has been here more than a month already!'

'That's nothing!' said Miss Carey. 'Even if that picture were finished to-morrow, neither of you should leave this place! You must stay till we go—stay till the end of October! You must not be so unkind as to refuse. My father and mother both wish this; they said so to me, and will say it to you.'

'It is very kind of them to think of such a thing,' said Nancy. 'We will talk of that afterwards. But for Frank's sake, Miss Carey, you might try to sit better.'

'How do you mean, Mrs. Davenport? However I sit, he is sure to get that thing done before he goes.'

'But he wants it done well! This is the first large and important picture he has ever been commissioned to paint. It will be certain to be well hung if he only succeeds with it as he would like—they always hang portraits well. And if it were thought good, it might make Frank's fortune!'

'You dear, foolish people, why, in the name of all that is sensible, did you not explain all that to me before?' said Miss Carey, in amazement. 'I had no idea so much depended on the picture turning out well. Here, Mr. Davenport, just come on to this platform of yours, and put me exactly as you wish to have me; and you, Mrs. Davenport, please to take out your watch, and if you see me move one inch before two hours have passed, I'll pay any fine you like to impose! I can't sit more than two hours, for that will bring me to the time when I have to go to mamma.'

'Ah, you never fail in that duty, dear Miss Carey,' said Nancy kindly.

That was true. Never, by any chance, did Katherine Carey disappoint her poor mother, whose life was ebbing away so fast, though every aid which love could invent, or money buy, was hers.

Davenport was slowly moving to the platform.

'If you could give me two hours of real work to-day,' said he, doubtfully, 'it would help me wonderfully. I told you before I was doing a very critical bit!'

'If I could? I can!—I will! Wait, and you shall see. You ought to have made me understand sooner how important this picture was to you!'

Both Davenport and his wife had the fullest trust in her wish to do her utmost to help them by being a good sitter, but none whatever in her being able to exercise sufficient self-restraint and watchfulness to carry out her intention. Great, therefore, was their surprise to see the minute hand creeping round in its small circle, and then round again for the second time, but yet not performing its task with one whit more steadiness and precision than Miss Carey showed in performing hers.

Never before had Davenport had anything like such a good chance given him of making a fine picture. He worked on, snatching the fearful joy which had been so unexpectedly offered to him, feeling certain that it had only been granted in a fit of momentary caprice or compunction, and that to-morrow, and the day after, and all other days, he would be reduced to fight and struggle as before, to obtain the merest fugitive glimpse of his model in the attitude in which he wished to see her. At last she grew quite pale with fatigue, and it was impossible not to see that she was suffering.

'You are tired,' said he. 'Let us stop.'

'Indeed I am not!' she replied. 'Let me sit as long as I said I would.'

He could scarcely believe that she would hold out till the two hours were completed; but she did; and, precisely as the time had expired, she sprang down from her platform, exclaiming:

'Now I must go to my mother!' and ran out of the room.

Davenport and his wife stared at each other in utter amazement.

'Well,' said he, 'if anybody had told me that she could do that, I would have laughed at the very idea. After this, I shall always admire her. She was ready to faint with fatigue; but she would not give in. She only ran out of the room because she wanted to make us believe she was not tired. She is a splendid girl—full of character! She can force herself to do anything! What a pity she should be ruined—as she will be—by having all her own way!'

'I don't suppose the life she leads will ruin her. It won't if her heart is in the right place. But, after all, Frank, we can't be certain that she will do this again. It will be very vexatious if to-morrow she sits as badly as ever!'

'Very! But she won't. At first I thought she was only making an effort for once; but there was no end of determination in those eyes of hers. She will sit just as well to-morrow.'

Next day she ascended her platform in a much more business-like manner than she had ever done before,

'I will sit two hours. I'll sit really well ; but, Mr. and Mrs. Davenport, you both understand, I hope, that if you do get your work done sooner than you expected, it does not at all mean that we shall allow you to leave Hazeldene till we do ?'

'Mrs. Carey has very kindly asked us to stay till then,' said Nancy. 'We have accepted most gratefully.'

'All right !' said Miss Carey ; and then for two hours she sat as she had sat the day before.

And so it went on for a month. She never by any chance allowed Davenport to trespass on the time she spent with her mother ; but Mr. Hackblock sometimes saw less of her than he thought he had a right to expect. As a rule, of course, he went up to town on business ; but still, there were times when this picture interfered with his schemes for the day, and sometimes he was indignant. The picture was, however, nearly finished, and the time, too, was drawing near when both the Careys and his own family would have to return to London, and when once these Davenports had gone back to their own little house in Shakespeare Street, he did not suppose that Katherine would see much more of them. Why should she wish to see more of them ? They belonged to another world, and had not one acquaintance in common with her. So he thought, but he was mistaken. He did not know that they were old friends of Lewis Barrington's. He did not know how often they talked of him, or how immeasurably Katherine's estimation of him had been raised by all that they had told her. He had no idea that on this particular morning, when he was congratulating himself on the speedy conclusion which London and its busy life would put to her friendship for these ill-chosen associates, she was about to renew an acquaintance which was much more dangerous. That very morning, for the first time for a month, Davenport found Miss Carey a most unsatisfactory model. Her restlessness was caused by something which had occurred just as work was beginning. The post had been late, and some letters which had been forwarded from London followed Davenport into what was now called the studio.

'Open them,' said Miss Carey ; 'don't you want to read them ?'

'Oh no, they'll keep ; or stay, it will be something for you to do, Nancy,' said he, for his heart and head were quite absorbed by his picture.

'All right,' answered Nancy. 'Now for your secrets, Frank.'

Frank smiled ; he was a thoughtless fellow, but he had not a secret in the world that Nancy might not know. The first two letters were dull ; but suddenly she exclaimed : 'Frank ! Frank ! Oh dear, you can't think how vexed I am ! But it can't be helped now ! It is for to-night !'

'What is for to-night ?' said he languidly. He could not be stirred up to much emotion about anything but what he was doing ; he was so delighted with his model, and so hopeful about his picture.

'It is vexing !' repeated Nancy.

'Nancy, you will make me angry with you, if you go on disturbing me so. I tell you what it is—you two young ladies can't both behave well at the same time ; if one is good, the other is naughty.'

'But it really is provoking ! Only think, Miss Carey, a friend of ours has sent us an order for a box at the Frivolity. Mr. Barrington is going to act Orlando in "As You Like It." I have never seen him, and they say he is splendid on the stage ! I don't mean,' she added, checking herself, 'that I am not just as happy here as it is possible to be ; but still, it is a pity to miss it.'

'I don't wonder at your thinking it a pity to miss such a thing, but why should you miss it ? Don't.'

'Oh, we must ! There is no time to do anything. We should have to sleep in London, and our house isn't ready ; it couldn't be got ready, for our servant is away, and no one there but a stupid old woman ; besides, it is so rude to wish to go.'

'Rude to wish to see Mr. Barrington act ! Not rude at all ; you would come back. Why, disagreeable as he is, and much as I dislike him, I'd give anything to see him act. There is something so clever about him ; something that one admires so !'

'Of course one does !' replied Nancy. 'It would be very strange if one didn't—it would show some want in one's self, I mean,' she added, nodding sagaciously. 'I suppose it is too late to send the order to anyone ?' she said ruefully.

'Let me look at your order,' said Miss Carey, bending forward to take it. "'Admit four,'" she read. 'It is a lovely large box ; perhaps the very best in the house.'

'Such a pity !' murmured Nancy. Box orders did not often come her way.

'If you went, you could take me,' said Katherine thoughtfully.

'Of course we could ; but it is no use thinking of what we could have done !'

'Wait a minute for me, Mr. Davenport,' said Katherine ; 'I'll come back directly.' She left the room, and ran to the butler's pantry. 'John ! John !' she exclaimed ; 'I want you to do something for me. Never mind your work ; that is of no consequence ! It is something I must have.'

The butler and everyone else in the house knew that when Miss Carey said that she must have a thing, there was nothing to be done but procure it for her, so he was all willingness at once.

'Get a carriage, and go to the station as quickly as you can, and telegraph to the housekeeper, in Princess Margaret Street, to have two bedrooms ready for to-night—mine and another ; and say that she must have some dinner at half-past six—not a minute later, John. That's all ; be sure to go at once ! Don't waste a minute, for it's a seven miles drive.' That done, she saw her maid, and gave her some orders about packing, and then she went to Mrs. Carey.

'Mother,' said she, 'I should like to go to London for one night

with the Davenports. They want to go to the theatre to-night, and I want to go with them. I knew you would say "yes," so I have made all arrangements. We will sleep at home, and return here in the morning ; it's all right, isn't it ?

Katherine was quite prepared for the answer she received.

'If you want to go, dear, of course it is right. But don't come back in the morning ; wait till the afternoon, and then you will have time to rest : and do take care how you get in and out of the railway-carriages.'

'It is all settled,' said Miss Carey, on re-entering the studio. 'We are going at half-past two. I hope you won't mind sleeping in Princess Margaret Street ; it's better than bothering your old woman. Now I'll come back to you, Mr. Davenport ; I am afraid I shall not please you, though—I am too happy to be able to keep quiet. I have not been to the theatre for ages ; I am delighted with the idea of going—quite delighted !'

Nancy was delighted too, but her husband looked as if he wished all the theatres in London at the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER IX.

'True, a goodly man !

What shapeliness and state he hath, what eyes,

Brave brow, and lordly lip ! Were it not fit

Great queens should love him ?'

CHASTELAERD.

THE Frivolity was not a large theatre, though a very pretty one. It had been newly decorated during the summer, but it was not these new decorations that made Katherine's eyes rest on it in such delight, but the fact that she had now been for many weeks in the country and far from London and London's delicious pleasures. She enjoyed a ball or a good play with all the delight of a girl in her teens, who, after spending years of her life in the schoolroom, suddenly tastes joys of this dazzling nature, and tastes them only at very rare intervals. I said a good play, but bad indeed must have been the acting, and poor the play, which was not called 'good' by Katherine. To-night she anticipated even more pleasure than usual. The play was 'As You Like It.' It was to be acted by a company of amateurs for the benefit of the children of a well-known dramatic author, who had been cut off in the prime of life, leaving a penniless family, and a band of friends prompt to bestir themselves to give help. The play, if a success, was to be repeated for several nights ; and as all the actors were men of mark, and as great celebrities as the company got together by Charles Dickens in aid of the Dramatic Guild, it was easy to understand Katherine's excitement. The actresses were professional, and the part of Rosalind was to be performed by the prettiest and best actress on the stage.

‘It is interesting, of course, to see men like these on the boards,’ said Davenport, with the indifference of one familiar with such sights, ‘very interesting, and they have always some good ideas which they try to bring out ; but so far as real acting goes, I don’t suppose that one of them will be good for anything, except the women.’

‘I thought, Nancy, you said that Mr. Barrington acted splendidly ?’ exclaimed Katherine.

‘So I did,’ replied Nancy manfully ; ‘I know he does.’

‘For an amateur, of course, you mean,’ said Davenport carelessly. ‘Yes, I have always heard he did.’

Katherine was thoughtful for a moment ; and then she told herself that, supposing he did not act very well, she should not be at all sorry. There would, indeed, be a certain pleasure in seeing him fail a little, when aware that he was acting in her presence. It would be a just punishment for having made such great promises to her about her own poor play, and then breaking them all so disgracefully ! Such was the feeling which she told herself was uppermost in her mind : but she was trying to assume a hardness contrary to her nature, and this was proved by the nervousness she felt when Barrington came on the stage. She trembled lest he should show any inferiority. Suppose he were nervous ? Suppose he forgot his part ? Suppose the spectators, of whom there were a goodly number, seemed altogether dead to his efforts to please them ? Barrington came on, and scarcely had he said the first words of his part, than she knew that he himself felt quite at home in it, and had no fear of failing. That at once gave her confidence, and she ceased to have any feeling but pleasure. Her pleasure increased with each development of the part ; he was a first-rate actor—at least, she thought so—and he certainly spoke and looked his part as if it had been written for him. He made a very charming lover. He was so deeply in love, and showed it so prettily, that no woman could help sympathizing with him. The play, too, gives such a delicious picture of happy, open-air life. Sweet birds sing, light breezes blow, trees wave green, and beneath these stray lovers as free as everything around them. Katherine was all eyes, all delight. The play was beautifully put upon the stage, and pleased her as a series of lovely pictures would have done. Its words, though so well known, are always heard with new pleasure ; the actors were men whose names were all familiar and interesting to her, and Barrington for many reasons was intensely interesting.

She watched and listened, and was profoundly stirred. Nancy was stirred, too. The earnest love on the stage reminded her of her own love, not one whit less earnest and delightful. Orlando might love his Rosalind, but others could love as well as he. Katherine was looking at the stage—all eyes were bent on the stage. Nancy’s hand stole quietly away under cover of pendent laces, to find her

Frank's hand—his was half-way on the road to find hers. Katherine happened to turn, and saw this; and on looking again, five minutes afterwards, saw that Nancy and her husband were still sitting, hand locked in hand, like lovers, looking at the lovers on the stage, and feeling superior to every ill of life, just because life had suffered them to be together. Katherine felt a sudden trouble. If she and Roger had been sitting side by side, and if she had been quite, quite certain that they were hidden from all eyes, would her impulse, on feeling her heart moved by seeing the love of others, have been to slip her hand tenderly into Roger's hand, to show him that no one sentiment was being expressed on the stage which she did not understand and share? That was what Nancy and Frank were doing their best to convey to each other. She did not think that the same idea would have occurred to herself and Roger. Not because they did not love each other, she was sure, for they did and always would; but if not for that reason, why? She could not wrench her thoughts away from the stage sufficiently to answer that question. She thrust it into the limbo of things which must wait for a more convenient season before they received full attention. Even she had a little limbo of this kind.

Between the third and fourth acts, Mr. Levison, a friend of Davenport's, came into the box. 'What do you think of the play?' said he.

'It's a great success.'

'I think so, but Barrington is not satisfied.'

'He is acting beautifully!' said Nancy. 'How do you know he is not satisfied?' she added. 'Have you been behind the scenes?'

She uttered these last words with a gasp of eager interest. Most people do look on those who are privileged to go behind the scenes with a kind of reverent awe.

'Yes, for a few minutes. I had a word or two with him there. He did not know you were in town until I told him.'

'Didn't know that we were in town, when we have been sitting for two hours within a couple of yards of him?' said Nancy incredulously.

'Oh, but Mrs. Davenport—he does not look about him. He's far too good an actor to do that. He acts to a black mass in front, whose ingredients he does not analyze. I must not forget to give you a message he sent by me. He wants you not to go out with the first rush of people, for he has something to say to you, and will come to your box.'

Katherine listened intently. Did he know that she was there? she wondered. She felt nervous when she thought that before the evening was over she should see him again.

'Tell him we'll wait,' said Davenport.

The rising of the curtain checked all further conversation.

When Barrington came on he glanced in the direction of the box

where he had been told that the Davenports were sitting. It was only a glance of friendly interest, and his face showed that he allowed himself this one glimpse of his friends, in full confidence of being able to forget that they were there the next moment. There was a flash of pleasure in his eyes as they rested on Frank. Next he saw Nancy ; but suddenly he appeared to perceive who was with them, for the colour mounted to his face, and he was visibly startled. But oh, the wondrous power of treating a vast assemblage of people as a mere abstraction !—a power possessed by Her Majesty's servants of the theatres in an even larger measure than by reverend divines. In another moment, Barrington was Orlando again, and went on as if nothing had happened. He never looked again—never, that is, but once. When he uttered the words, ' But oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes ! ' he raised his eyes to Katherine, spoke with great earnestness, and then appeared to forget that she was there. Somehow or other, however, he suddenly began to act infinitely better than he had done before—his words came straight from the heart—he actually lived his part. The great actress who was playing with him, herself came under the spell which his vivid impersonation of his part seemed to cast over her. She herself had never played with such intensity. Katherine was completely carried away ; her whole nature was subdued by admiration. Barrington's genius was irresistible—she felt that he must be noble and lovable to the heart's core. She heaved a long sigh of satisfaction when the curtain fell. This night had supplied her with food for enjoyment for years and years to come ! The house rang with applause—no applause could convey a tithe of what she felt. Many of the actors and actresses came before the curtain. To her mind he was the one who had done all. And she knew him—she had spoken to him—she was prouder than she had ever been in her life ! She clapped her hands—she gazed on the stage with eyes brightened by the delight of seeing a great work nobly rendered ; her lips were half opened, her breath came quickly. All was over.

All would never be over to her ; but how strange it was that those around her were treating this as a mere play like any other play ! It was most horrible to see the people down below in the stalls beginning to move away with as much indifference as if they had been at an instructive lecture at the Royal Institution. Some had even gone before the end of the fifth act. Katherine had been far too much engrossed to be more than dimly aware of that, but she did see those last people move away, and despised them for their sluggish, dull natures.

But even Davenport and Nancy were not so very much better.

' Well, it went off capitally,' said he.

' Most capitally,' said Nancy, who liked to repeat Frank's words. ' He really is clever ! '

‘Clever!’ Katherine’s whole soul was ablaze with indignation. ‘Clever!’ She turned from Nancy, lest her ears should be assailed by this word again; but what was this? Lights were being put out, great shrouding curtains pulled up or let down over the boxes—no work is done with such celerity as that of packing up a theatre for the night.

‘I thought that Barrington was coming,’ said Davenport.

‘It is odd,’ said Nancy.

‘I don’t know that it is,’ he answered. ‘He will have to speak to no end of people, and there will be all sorts of congratulations to listen to.’

At this moment a scrap of paper was put into Davenport’s hands by the box-keeper, with a few lines written in pencil: ‘Can’t see you to-night. Very sorry. Will try to do so soon.’

Katherine shut her lips tightly together: excitement and pleasure had made her forget how strangely Barrington always avoided her, otherwise she would have been prepared for this, after he had once seen her in the Davenports’ box.

‘Come,’ said she, ‘come at once, or we shall be left alone in the dark.’ She wrapped her cloak round her defiantly, and made her way out, neither looking to the right nor the left as she went, lest she should have the vexation of seeing him. Arrived at home, she threw herself into a chair in a perturbed manner—she was not accustomed to be disappointed.

‘Oh, how I have enjoyed myself!’ said Nancy, with a yawn. The two girls were sitting in easy chairs by the fire; Davenport was at the table cutting slices of cold fowl for them. They said they had enjoyed themselves, but each sipped her champagne languidly, with a regretful sense that all had not gone quite right.

‘It was vexing not to see Mr. Barrington,’ said Nancy, so her discontent was explained. Katherine’s might have been expressed in the same words.

‘By-the-bye, he lives just over the way, Nancy!’ exclaimed Davenport; then he smiled, and, for the hundredth time lately, remembered that day when Barrington had first seen Miss Carey. He had been immensely struck by her then; it was odd that he should so soon have become indifferent to her.

‘He might come and see us here,’ said Nancy eagerly. ‘Would you have any objection to that, Katherine?’

‘Yes, great! Don’t ask him to come here!’ she exclaimed, and then she checked herself in some confusion.

‘I say, Miss Carey,’ said Davenport, coming to her aid, ‘did you observe how very much better Barrington’s acting was in the last two acts than in either of the others? It was just as if he had suddenly discovered a way of throwing his whole heart into it—wasn’t it?’

‘You know I don’t particularly admire your Mr. Barrington!’

said she, rather irrelevantly ; in spite of her great admiration for him, she could not help being very angry with him.

‘But I thought you admired him so tremendously !’ exclaimed Nancy.

‘Can’t one admire him and not admire him ?’ said Katherine carelessly. ‘That’s what I do. Sometimes I think him charming in every way, and so he is—I never saw anyone more so—but it is equally true that he isn’t ! If you ask for my sober, deliberate opinion of Mr. Barrington, I think he is the most disagreeable, selfish, unpleasant man I ever met.’

There was yet another phase of thought which found place in Katherine’s mind—that it was an honour to know such a man on any terms, and even better to be ill-treated by him than not thought worthy of notice at all.

‘Frank,’ said Nancy, when they at last retired to rest, ‘can you explain what makes Mr. Barrington behave so oddly to Katherine ?’

‘No, dear ; indeed I can’t. He must be afraid of getting to like her too much. Nancy, you are not to talk to her about him. I said so at first, and I say so again—I am sure it is better not.’

CHAPTER X.

‘Decidedly I must get the secrétaire and the Louis XVI. cupboard from Tours. The room will then be complete. It is a matter of 1,000 francs, but what could be had for 1,000 francs in modern furniture? Bourgeois platitudes, wretched things, without value and without taste.’—BALZAC to *Madame de Hanska*.

NANCY had never been so long absent from home since her marriage. She had a strong inclination to go there, just to see how the dear place looked after such a separation.

‘If you are going to Shakespeare Street,’ said Miss Carey, ‘do take me with you. I do so want to see your house, especially your gold bed.’

Nancy knew that her home would seem poor and strange to Miss Carey ; at least, she feared that there was a chance of it. To herself, that house in Shakespeare Street, with its underground dining-room, steep stairs, limited number of feet of frontage, and dull outlook, was a heaven on earth, in which she and Frank lived and loved each other. To her mind, no house she had ever seen was half so beautiful. How could it be otherwise when Frank, who had a perfect genius for decoration, had himself done everything to make it beautiful ? There was not an ugly or unpicturesque bit in it, from the basement to the attics. The rooms were quiet and homelike, and had a touch of old-world reality and suggestiveness about them which made you believe that you had accidentally stumbled on the tenderly-preserved house where some great man of other days had lived and done his work.

'I like your home immensely !' said Katherine ; 'I'd like to have one exactly like it. But don't forget that the thing I want to see more than anything else is that gold bed—it sounds so royal ! Can't I see that ?'

She was taken upstairs. It was now the bed in which the Davenports themselves slept. Nancy had protested against it—Nancy had affirmed that she could never rest quietly in it, knowing as she did that it had swallowed up so much of the money on which they ought to have lived ; but Frank had persisted in saying that it was an art education of itself to sleep in that bed, and he was not going to let Nancy forego it. Nancy did sleep in that bed, and for some time, as soon as the earliest rays of morning touched the tails of the dolphins at her feet, she woke up in soft surprise that another day had come so quickly. 'Oh, it's only Frank's gold bed,' she always said to herself on these occasions ; 'it does catch the light before anything else.' She was too good a wife to grumble at being disturbed so early, and somehow or other she generally fell asleep again. The hangings of this bed were of subdued brocade ; it occupied more than one-third of the room, but there was no denying that the effect was rather regal. It looked as if its owners were people of condition, who had had grandfathers and grandmothers before them ; and Nancy felt soothed by the consciousness of this, and reconciled to her new possession.

'So that is the bed !' said Miss Carey, who never before had seen people admire any piece of furniture which had not won a medal in an International Exhibition. 'So that is the gold bed you told me about, Mr. Davenport !' For Davenport had been the one to tell the tale, not poor Nancy. 'It requires a little time to accustom one's self to it, but I really believe I rather like it.'

Two dolphins—enormous ones—disported themselves at its foot, back to back ; their tails curled up with heraldic pomp in the middle, floral decorations supported them ; scrolls and floral decorations ran along the sides. Looking at the top, you might have imagined yourself witnessing a strong deputation of antediluvian monsters rearing their heads in unavailing prayer for the further continuance of the deluge.

'I suppose that bed is in very good taste ?' said Katherine, who was as ignorant as a baby, or as the greater part of her fellow-creatures, on all matters connected with art.

'It is in extremely good *bad* taste,' replied Davenport.

'How I do wonder what that means !' said she, turning sweet inquiring eyes on his.

'It is a remarkably beautiful specimen of the work of a time when all taste was vitiated.'

'Oh !' answered Katherine, as if this explanation satisfied a great want of her being ; but presently she added, 'I don't like those

great gold creatures, rampaging about on dry land, ornamenting beds. One knows that fishes never care to do that.'

'But look at the fine lines! and what a splendid design there is!'

Seeing that Katherine was silent, he added:

'I know that I spent a great deal more money on it than I ought to have done, but I was not so much to blame as you may think; for I mean to paint a lot of pictures from it. It will paint splendidly. Just look at the sweep of those dolphins' tails! Did you ever see anything so fine?'

'But you couldn't make a picture of dolphins' tails?'

'Of course not, Miss Carey; but with a figure——'

'Leaning against it? Something in this way, I suppose?' said she, and she suited the action to the word; and, either because she had derived some knowledge of what was required from being so much with Davenport, or merely by accident, she threw herself into an attitude in which the lines of her figure composed so exquisitely with the curves of the strange sea-monsters on the Louis Quinze bed, that Davenport threw up his hands in amazement and delight, and told her that if she would but stand still for ten minutes, she would make his fortune.

He had imagined how well a figure would 'come' with this background; but what he saw before him surpassed his most extravagant hopes.

'For heaven's sake don't move!' said he once more, and pulled out his pencil and sketch-book.

Katherine was only too glad to do anything to help the Davenports. She liked them, and she liked their home. It was the first house she had ever seen on which individual taste had set its seal. Those she best knew had been filled with furniture, regardless of expense, by this or that great firm of upholsterers, and nothing in their rooms ever inspired any particular feeling of love.

Now Davenport and his wife seemed really to love their little bits of china, and queer, ugly old chairs and tables; and these things seemed to be parts of themselves. They went from room to room inquiring, as it were, after the welfare of each with anxious affection. They fingered their china with delicate reverence, patted the cushions of their chairs and sofas as if they derived some recondite pleasure from touching them, and gazed round their rooms with an air of regretful longing, as if sorry to have been so long parted from them. It was something quite beyond the range of Katherine's experience. Hitherto, she had understood the pleasure of possessing books, ornaments, or jewellery, but had considered the obtaining a due supply of chairs and tables for a house to be as much a matter of arrangement with a tradesman as the getting in tea, sugar, legs of mutton, and fowls.

Such were the thoughts which passed through her mind as Frank made his sketch of her. She had no idea how beautiful she looked

—never imagined that he cared to have her there except for the one reason that he must have somebody to set up against that beautiful gold background he was so anxious to paint. As for Davenport, he never even paused for a moment; he was so anxious to secure a record of that happy and spontaneous attitude which his good angel had inspired her to assume. He was all on fire with delight that fortune should have thus thrown down before him as a free gift what it would have taken him months to invent for himself.

Katherine would have been amused at the energy with which he was working, if practice had not made her such a good model that she never thought of what was passing near her.

‘Then I may move?’ she said, when he released her; and, as she spoke, she stretched her cramped limbs. ‘Let me see what sort of a sketch you have made!’

It was charming. Katherine, in all her beauty, was leaning thoughtfully against her antique background. Her head was thrown back, so was one arm, and her hand was placed beneath her head.

Davenport had caught the likeness admirably. A painter might have toiled for months, and his finished picture would not have recalled her to her friends with half the truth and vividness of this sketch.

Katherine looked at it and smiled; she could not but see that it was exactly like her, and extremely pretty.

‘Yes,’ said she presently, ‘that’s all very well, Mr. Davenport; but that is a portrait of me, and not of your gold bed. You bring it in in far too subdued a manner. I will show you how you ought to have placed me if you wanted to do full justice to the picture-making properties of your purchase. I ought to have had my face turned away—oughtn’t I, Nancy? I ought to have stood this way, with my back turned to you two.’

As she spoke, she turned away from them, and leaned against the foot of the bed in a slightly stooping posture; but a better bit of composition than she made as she half stood, half leaned against her dolphins, could hardly have been conceived.

Davenport was quite overjoyed with this second good gift of fortune.

‘Don’t move! Don’t move on any account!’ he exclaimed. ‘Just let me have time to sketch you. If you will stay as you are till I have done that, I will be grateful to you for ever! Miss Carey, I do believe you are a born artist! You have the instincts of one, that’s certain!’

‘But what shall I do?’ said she. ‘My hair has come down!’
‘So much the better! How splendid it looks! That colour is worth anything!’ and, full of delight, he fell to work again.

Her hair—her ruddy golden hair—rolled over the sloping back of one of the gilded dolphins; her head drooped in happy harmony

with their curves. Her face was not seen, but its beauty could be more than guessed at.

Davenport would willingly have fasted for a month for the chance of seeing this. She stood absolutely still until the time came when he would say that she might move. Not that he ever did say so; for, when he had finished his sketch, he shut the book with the air of a man who had received a priceless gift, and said:

'Miss Carey, I don't know how to thank you enough! You have done me *such* a service!' Then, while Katherine was beginning to roll up her hair, he turned to his wife, and said: 'Nancy, I want you for a minute—just one minute! Come into the next room.'

'What do you want, dear?' said she, following him immediately.

'I want to give you this kiss, darling; and to tell you that our fortune is made! I *shall* paint such a picture from that sketch!'

When Katherine came downstairs, a pretty little luncheon had been set out for her. It was composed of the most simple materials; but the 'stupid old woman' had received her orders, and had obeyed them. Some grapes, some pears, some very good bread-and-butter, and a cake were there; more could scarcely be expected from an 'empty-house keeper.' Frank got out a bottle of claret, and the three sat down as happily as possible to enjoy it.

Katherine was rather tired.

'Suppose,' said Nancy, who saw that she was more fatigued than she would admit—'suppose, dear Katherine, you and I rest here until the time comes for us to return to Hazeldene? It is half-past two now; we need not move till four—that is, if Frank will trust us to go to Waterloo alone, and will go to your house for our luggage? We could all meet at the station. You need not leave us yet, Frank.'

'But I'd rather. I should like to spend an hour with Barrington; and that would combine with getting your boxes, or whatever it is that I am to bring, from Princess Margaret Street.'

He departed, and Nancy made Katherine lie down on the sofa, and then went and discoursed with her old woman on high matters appertaining to housekeeping. After a while Nancy came to Katherine, and said:

'I am going out for a minute or two, if you don't object to being left. That tiresome woman downstairs wants ever so many things, and I suppose I'd better order them myself. Won't you have a book? You will find something or other in that bookcase. If my old woman does not hear me knock when I come back, will you be so good as to ring the bell—she'll hear that. She is so deaf she may not hear me. Good-bye; make yourself comfortable.'

Katherine was quite ready to obey. She went to get a book, and, after taking out two or three, espied an unbound copy of one of Barrington's plays. How strange it seemed to read the words, 'A Drama, in five acts, by Lewis Barrington'! She was soon deep in

the first act, and read on, pleased but indignant; for how good it was, and how little trouble it had cost him to write it! From beginning to end there was nothing in it that might not have happened; and all the people in it just said to each other the very things they naturally would say.

Miss Carey thought it very easy to produce work of this kind, and read on with a growing sense of indignation. It was too bad of him to refuse to write another play for her. There was a knock at the door.

'It is Nancy,' thought Katherine. 'How quick she has been! Or, perhaps my book has made the time pass so quickly? I must listen to hear if that old woman lets her in.'

She heard her open the door, so that was all right. Almost immediately after, the door of the room where she was opened also, and in walked Barrington. Katherine's head and face were hidden by a tall desk. He saw a bit of her dress, and, nothing doubting, said:

'Mrs. Davenport, I have come at once to see you. I am afraid you thought it very strange of me not to keep my word, and come to your box last night, but the fact is——'

Here Katherine recovered from her surprise, and, in order to prevent him from betraying more than he ought—for probably he was about to say, 'I was kept away by that disagreeable Miss Carey!'—she rose quietly to her feet, saying, with much dignity:

'Mrs. Davenport has gone out for a short time. She is certain to return in a few minutes, if you will wait for her;' and having uttered these words with much frigidity and seriousness, she left the room so quickly that Barrington had no time to speak.

He had not for one second expected to find her there. He was pained, and beyond all measure astonished and disappointed, at her leaving him thus abruptly. She had shut the door behind her. He stood there too much startled and embarrassed to know how to deal with this sudden emergency. He stood for a minute in doubt. Where had she gone? She had her bonnet on, and other garments befitting the open air; and while he was hesitating whether to follow her or no, he heard, or thought he heard, the street-door shut. She had gone to her own home!

He had no very clear idea of the Careys' and Davenports' movements, but supposed that Miss Carey had come here to see Mrs. Davenport, was waiting for her, and he had driven her away! He would have given anything that this had not happened. Why had he not acted more quickly? That promise to Mrs. Dalrymple fettered him at every turn; but he had not promised to be rude! Fidelity to that promise might be carried too far; day after day it was making him behave like a surly brute.

Dr. Johnson said that there was only one thing more foolish than making a vow, and that was keeping it. He did not agree with the

doctor there ; he would keep it—it was right to do so—but not with such savage virtue as heretofore.

Well, Miss Carey was gone, and Frank's wife would be back directly, so he would wait. Waiting was a bore, especially with the thought of this disagreeable little occurrence for sole amusement. If he could but find some book ! What was that book Miss Carey had dropped as she arose so haughtily from the sofa ? How beautiful she had looked as, with averted eye and cheek flushed with surprise and something very like displeasure, she had passed him by so swiftly !—He stooped to pick up the book she had been reading ; it was one of his own plays !—She had been reading that !—He took it up and looked at it, but soon found himself turning the pages almost with hatred of what he saw. What wretched trash it appeared to him, now that the heat and ardour of production was a thing of the past, and his work had gone forth from him, and was no longer a part of himself !—How infamously ill-put that bit was, and so was this. There was hardly a page where he did not see whole paragraphs which wanted striking out altogether !

‘How horrible it is,’ thought he, ‘to catch sight of one of these children of one's brain after one has been separated from it for some time. When I sent this out into the world alone, I really did think it had strength to take care of itself ; and, after all, it is a stupid, rickety, half-formed bantling, with no go in it whatsoever ! I can't sit here reading rubbish of my own writing—that's too dismal ! Let me see, Frank's wife was to come directly, but I must have been waiting more than half an hour. I wish Miss Carey had stayed where she was. I've made a disagreeable morning of it for myself, anyhow. I think I'll just go to the studio. If there is no work of Frank's to look at, he has lots of jolly things on his walls. I wish I had gone there at first.’

He ran up one flight of stairs ; he began to run up another, but at the top of the second, sitting on the stairs in a recess, in which stood two sap-green sofas and one old oak table with some ferns on it, was Miss Carey. She looked tired of waiting, and very cold. Well might she do so, for all the draughts of the house found their way with sure precision into that recess where she had taken refuge. He continued to ascend ; she turned, and saw his handsome but anxious eyes fixed on her in doubt and regret.

‘Miss Carey,’ said he earnestly, ‘you left that room where you were reading and resting, and came here to this cold place. I am very much afraid that you did so on my account.’

‘I don't deny it,’ she answered coldly.

‘I was afraid so,’ said he.

She neither looked up nor spoke, but her face seemed to say, ‘You can scarcely be surprised at that.’ Her eyes were bent on the ground, or she must have been touched by his most evident regret. He stood there, pained by the change which had taken place in her

manner, and humiliated by the consciousness of the false colours in which he was compelled to appear before her. What was he to do? How could he reconcile honour and inclination? She was deeply offended by the slights he had put on her—slights which would never have been so much as remarked by another, were cruelly apparent to this spoilt child of fortune, who did not know what it was to have 'No' said to her. Barrington resolved to confront the fact boldly, and said impetuously :

'Miss Carey, you impute my refusal of various kind invitations, and my avoidance of yourself, to indifference to your company.'

'Then you own you avoided me?' said she, in some surprise.

'Yes, I own it. You see I am as outspoken as you.'

'If you wish to avoid me, you ought to be grateful to me if I do leave the room when we happen to meet.'

'I am grateful in a fashion—in the fashion in which one is grateful to the surgeon's knife; but if you think that I avoid you because I don't want to see you, all I can say is, that you never made a greater mistake in your life!'

Katherine looked very doubtful. She maintained a distrustful silence. He would have liked to throw himself at her feet, and tell her that he had loved and worshipped her from the hour he had first seen her; but he was pledged to silence and coldness, and could only say, 'You still think ill of me?'

'I do not know that it is thinking ill of you to believe that you refused our invitations because you did not wish to accept them. We have no right to blame you for that. The only thing that I feel I have a right to reproach you for is the way you treated me about that play—my poor play! You *were* cruel about that! You made me hope so much, and then said you would do nothing at all to help me.'

'Forgive me,' said he—'forgive me, I entreat you; I am not free to do as I would like—that is the honest truth, and you may as well know it.'

Katherine understood in a moment, or thought she did. He was engaged to some silly girl who was jealous, and did not like him to do things to please other girls. Poor fellow! so that was the reason. He was between two fires; if he did a thing to please her, he vexed that other girl, and *vice versa*. She felt very sorry for him. Her anger went. Her face assumed its old expression of trusting confidence, and she said:

'Then I won't say any more about it.'

'You are generous!' said he; 'you understand. On my honour, there is nothing I prize more than the pleasure of being with you; and it is not of my own free-will that I forego it.'

Katherine thought it was scarcely fair to his young lady to pay such compliments to herself. He was going too far now; but he had behaved so ill, that a little exaggeration only made the balance true.

‘Then we are friends?’ said she.

‘Friends!’ said he eagerly. ‘Friends! yes, now and always, so far as I am concerned. Never be persuaded to think otherwise.’

‘There’s a knock—it’s Nancy!’ said Katherine.

‘Before she comes,’ said he in haste, ‘do tell me that you forgive me, and that we may be friends.’

‘Yes,’ replied Katherine, ‘I do, I will; but, Mr. Barrington, it is much easier and pleasanter to be friends with the people one sees, than with those one doesn’t.’

‘I will see you! I must see you!’ he exclaimed, for Nancy was already coming into the house. ‘I will try if it can be arranged—I am sure it can—and, Miss Carey, I will write that play for you; I will, upon my honour!’

Nancy tripped blithely in; she had bought ever so many yards of house-flannel, ever so many bars of the best yellow household-soap; she had provided bees’-wax and turpentine, and what not, and came back with all the elation of a British matron who has just set a-going a vigorous ‘thorough cleaning.’ She was not a bit surprised at seeing Barrington and Katherine together; sweet, placid Nancy never wasted time or tissue in being surprised at anything. She was only sorry for Frank’s disappointment in not finding his friend at home. ‘But we are all coming back to London directly,’ said she to Barrington. ‘We are only to stay another fortnight at Hazeldene, and then we shall all come home, and see a great deal of you, I hope.’ Barrington hoped it, too; nay, more, he felt as if her words were prophetic.

CHAPTER XI.

‘Ignorance
Never hurts devotion.’

LANDOR.

‘All this day an unaccustomed spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thought.’

Romeo and Juliet.

THE railway journey to Malham occupied an hour and a half, and then there was a drive of seven miles to Hazeldene; but if on her arrival there the exact number of words uttered by Miss Carey on the way had been counted, they would barely have amounted to fifty. Between Waterloo and Malham she said nothing but ‘Thank you.’ Between Malham and Hazeldene she contented herself with offering a shawl to Nancy, and absently seconding a hope expressed by Frank that they would not be late for dinner. She put a stop to all attempts to draw her into conversation by lying back in the carriage, and shutting her eyes. It was an attitude which she had every right to assume, for she was dreaming all the while. She did not remember where she was; she did not think where she was

going ; she was perfectly unaware that she was not alone. She had suddenly discovered a new world—a bewilderingly delightful world, whose existence she had never so much as suspected. It is difficult to believe that any girl could have lived nineteen years without having had her imagination forcibly touched, yet such was the case with Katherine Carey ; but now that she had tasted that joy, she gave herself up to it, and looked back on the whole of her past existence with dismayed astonishment. How could she have borne it ? She had vegetated ; she had slept ; she had not lived at all until the last four-and-twenty hours ! How much had happened in a short time ! What delights there were in this world for those whose minds were open to receive them ! Her mind had not been altogether open to receive this new revelation ; an interpreter had come to make all plain to her. She remembered with much self-abasement that she had read that play, and that she had not been so very much struck by it when it was unilluminated by Barrington's genius. Reading that play to herself had been like seeing a fine scene in nature without the vivifying force of sunlight. She recalled each scene in which he appeared on the stage. She tried to recall each word he had said. She had never before known how handsome he was, never so much as dreamed of the fascination which could lie in the human voice when swayed by passion, or love. His voice rang in her ears now ; his eyes flashed in her memory. His genius placed him far above her and everyone, and yet he was more humble than the most stupid person of her acquaintance. How kind it was of him to say that he felt pleasure in being with her ; how noble to tell her the truth about that girl to whom he was engaged ! That at once explained his past strange conduct. The girl must be a stupid creature ; but how sweet it was of him to humour her folly. She did not believe that she herself could be so good as to sacrifice her likings at the bidding of anyone she loved. Could she ? As she put this question to herself, she felt a curious thrill of pain, and abandoned that train of thought.

Never before had she in any way interrogated herself as to the nature and extent of her affection for Roger Hackblock. That is, never except the night before at the theatre, when she had been so struck by seeing the Davenports sitting hand in hand, and it had flashed on her mind that strong emotion would never make her feel any inclination to place her hand in Roger's by way of showing that they were one, and felt as one. Last night she had refused to let her mind dwell on that thought because it interfered with present enjoyment ; to-day she did not like to think of it—it chilled her. She never did think of such things. She accepted the fact that she was engaged, as she accepted many other facts—that is, without much searching into the reason for their existence. She had promised to marry Roger because her father and mother had told her that it had been the dearest wish of their hearts for many years

that she should marry him. She had left the disposal of her future life in their hands, just as she had left the past. They had told her that she ought to marry him, and she could not help seeing that if she were to marry at all it did seem more natural to choose a man whom she had known all her life than anyone else, especially when so many people were so anxious about it. Her acceptance of Roger had been hailed with a transport of joy that was very delightful to her. A glow of contentment had henceforth filled both households, and in this genial warmth Katherine basked and revelled. She had done what was expected of her, and enjoyed the sight of the pleasure she had given, and now she had four parents who loved her and watched her movements with delighted admiration, instead of two. She felt herself to be a little sun to two homes. No one had ever yet been able to discover a single fault in her; no one had ever exacted the sacrifice of any of her likings—it was the received opinion that she could not do, or think, anything wrong. Suppose Roger ever became tyrannical, like Mr. Barrington's betrothed? Suppose he ever displayed the same petty jealousy that she did?

'Roger has a great deal too much sense! Roger knows I like him, and there's an end of it!' said the girl to herself, with a pettish anger, which showed that some thought was passing through her mind about which she was not entirely comfortable.

'Perhaps,' thought she presently, 'Mr. Barrington's young lady is quite right to put some restrictions on his liberty. If I were in her place, I should not like his looking at any girl as he sometimes looks at me.'

Then she blushed—she couldn't help blushing at the recollection of some of the things that he had said, and of the way he had looked as he spoke.

'Is it possible that he does care just a very little for me? she asked; and as she put this question to herself, the warm blood rushed to her face, and her heart throbbed with a strange surprise and pleasure.

'Ah, me!' thought she, 'if such a man as that had happened to love me in real down-right earnest, I would have been his slave for ever and ever!'

She pursued the idea—she thought of the bliss of being the life-long companion of a great man—of actually witnessing the creation of works which would live on, and delight the world when she and he and all now on earth were dust. She did not repine at her lot being cast on a lowlier level. Not one man in a thousand was as great a genius as Barrington! Only one woman in a thousand could be so happy as to win him. She corrected herself, and added: 'Only one woman in more than a thousand can win him, for there are more women than men in the world. I read that in a book somewhere—only one woman in perhaps twelve hundred—I don't

know the right number to say, and it does not matter, for I am not the one.'

She felt herself large enough of heart and soul to comprehend the ways of a great man, and to sacrifice herself to the development of his genius in everything. To be the companion of such a man as Barrington would be a heaven on earth; but she did not regret her lost chance—she was too humble to believe that she could ever have come within range of the possibility of having had a chance. She was happy to have seen him—to have spoken to him, and he was going to write her a play. If he would but dedicate it to her—if he would let all who lived now and all who were to live hereafter know that she had been a friend of his, and that he had thought her worthy of this honour—that would be enough, and more than enough for her. She was not in the very least in love with him, but she was over head and ears, and deeper still than that, in admiration. She had no idea how she was overrating him.

She worshipped him as a woman who could better appraise and classify her geniuses would worship and reverence a Shakespeare. Suddenly the carriage stopped. She had arrived at her journey's end. A servant opened the carriage-door with much celerity. She saw her father in evening-dress, partly concealed by a greatcoat, standing in the porch.

'How do you do, Davenport? How do, Mrs. Davenport? and you, too, Kitty—you are late, my pet. I have been waiting for you more than ten minutes!'

'Oh, we have kept your dinner waiting!' exclaimed Katherine regretfully.

'You have kept Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock's dinner waiting, you mean. We are all to dine there.'

'You are not to dress,' added Mr. Carey, for he saw that Katherine looked as if she did not like the arrangement. 'You are just off a journey, and are to be excused.'

'But I like dressing!' said she, beginning to pout a little. 'Are we all invited?'

'Yes; all. Every one of you; so run away and smooth your hair.'

'I am not going!' observed spoilt Miss Katherine, with great decision.

'I never heard of such a thing!' said her father. 'They came to ask us, and I said we would all go; and we must go.'

'You may go,' said she; 'but I have not seen mother since yesterday morning. I can't spend this evening with anyone but her.'

'Oh, she will excuse you, my dear, I am sure!'

'“Excuse me!” As if I did not want to stay with her! No; you and Mr. and Mrs. Davenport can go if you choose, but I'll stay at home.'

'Katherine!' began Mr. Carey mildly, but fervently.

'I must,' she said imperatively. 'I am not going; so don't wait for me.'

'Well, if you are not going, you are not!' said he. 'You will go, I suppose, Mrs. Davenport?'

'If I am really invited,' said Nancy, who disliked all the Hackblocks, and wanted to stay at home.

'Of course you are invited,' interrupted Katherine; 'but don't go if you are tired, dear.'

Nancy thought that, in the interests of politeness and peace, she had better refrain from yielding to fatigue, and hastily ran upstairs to make some insignificant changes in her dress.

'You can send Roger for me about half-past nine,' said Katherine condescendingly to her father; 'I don't mind coming then, if they seem very much disappointed. Mother begins to go to bed then.'

'What am I to understand by that, Kitty? Do you wish to join the party at that time, or are you only going out of desire to oblige us all?'

'I don't want to go out again; I am rather tired.'

'Then, my dear child, you shall certainly not be sent for. Good-night, my darling; I am so glad to get you home again.'

CHAPTER XII.

'These little things are great to little men.'

GOLDSMITH.

'A mind that's scrimpit never wants some care.'

Gentle Shepherd.

THE Hackblocks readily forgave Katherine for deserting their dinner-table. To stay at home for the sake of spending an hour or two with an invalid mother is an excuse which is always accepted without a murmur.

'She is a dear good girl!' said Mrs. Hackblock to her son, the moment she heard it. 'Every day makes me more certain that you will be happy with her, Roger. She is simple and open-hearted, and there's no nonsense about her. I don't believe a thought ever passes through her mind that she would care to hide.'

'Of course not,' said Roger, who would also have maintained that the fewer thoughts of any kind, good or bad, that passed through any woman's mind, the better it was for her.

The Davenports were both rather tired, and too much out of harmony with their hosts to be able to shake off their fatigue. There was no need for them to exert themselves—none of the Hackblocks cared particularly for their company, or wanted to be amused by them. When no one of sufficient weight was present to make general conversation a necessity, the two old gentlemen were apt to

fall into business discussions. In these Roger always joined with warm interest ; and as for Mrs. Hackblock, she usually sat listening with an air of serene joy, which said, as plainly as words could, 'Talk of business as much as you like ; do just as you please. Of one thing I am quite certain—and that is, that in some shape or other, we shall all be the richer for what you are saying.'

They did talk. Frank looked at Nancy—Nancy looked at Frank : they felt like two worthless little feathers, caught up and whirled about unregarded by a strong current, which blew steadily and strenuously in the direction of money-getting. They were glad when it was time to return home again.

Katherine had gone to bed. She had spent a very happy evening, and had, as she believed, told her mother everything which had taken place during her absence. Looks cannot be accurately translated into words—half-formed thoughts cannot be rendered into plain English ; so Mrs. Carey was as ignorant of the true state of her daughter's mind as it was possible to be. Had Katherine done even more to give her a true impression, it is doubtful whether she could have attained that result. She herself could not understand a tithe of the thoughts which were trying to find a home in her brain.

Roger Hackblock, the younger, though himself a business man, could never be made to comprehend that other people had engagements as well as himself, and had set apart certain hours for doing certain things—arrangements, founded on convenience, which they did not like to alter. He understood the necessity of keeping office-hours, and the binding force of a dinner engagement, both for himself and for others ; he likewise understood the paramount importance of any business appointment. These things meant money ; but what engagement could Katherine have which ought not to be set aside if he, by any chance, were at home for a day, and wished to spend it with her ? She always went to her mother's room from half-past nine to half-past ten—that did not so much matter, for Mrs. Carey was only too glad to see him there too. Then Katherine went to the studio, where she stayed from eleven till one, after which Davenport might sometimes prevail on her to return for another half-hour ; but she did not consider herself pledged to do so. Roger was perfectly aware of these two engagements ; so he ought not to have been cross when he arrived at the house about half-past eleven, a few days after her visit to London, and was told that she was in the studio.

'Will you come here ?' she wrote on a bit of paper, when the servant told her that he was waiting. 'Do come ; I don't like to give up sitting when Mr. Davenport has just begun to work.'

Roger felt his dignity ruffled. He did not like the studio, and would not go there. That fellow Davenport seemed to think that he was lord and master in that room now. Katherine had given him

more sittings than enough for his picture. She must come and take a turn in the garden, and he wrote a line to that effect.

‘But I have already promised to go to luncheon with the Hackblocks,’ said Katherine to the Davenports, when this answer was brought her. ‘Papa was the bearer of an invitation to me, and I sent a note to accept it, before breakfast. I don’t see why I need go now. Suppose I just run and say a few words to Roger, and remind him that I am going there to luncheon? I need not stay. It would be a pity to let our sitting be interrupted.’

Davenport seemed very much put out at being disturbed at all; he certainly did not want to lose her; but Nancy pointed out Mr. Hackblock walking up and down the terrace outside, looking uncomfortably impatient, and said: ‘Katherine, you had better go. Don’t disappoint Mr. Hackblock.’

‘Mr. Hackblock knows when you want me here; he should come at a proper time,’ said she to Davenport; but as, on a sign from his Nancy, he affirmed that he could go on for a while quite well without his model, she went.

‘I was beginning to think that you did not intend to come, Kitty,’ said Roger.

‘I ought not to have come,’ she replied; ‘but here I am.’

‘Why ought you not to have come?’ said he, rather crossly. ‘I don’t see that there can be any “ought not” about it. It is not so very often that I stay away from business!’

‘Yes; but you know I am going to have luncheon at your house, and I can stay an hour or two afterwards if I like.’

‘Of course; but then I seemed to think that I should like to see you now.’

‘I like being with you now, too,’ said she, ‘only I have to think about that portrait. You see, it is so very important to Mr. Davenport to make a good picture of me—you must not mind my giving up a certain time every morning to him, while he is here.’

‘But he is always here! Isn’t it time he got done! I don’t like your Mr. Davenport, Kitty; if anyone asks me what kind of a man he is—when your portrait comes to be exhibited, I mean—I shall advise them not to employ him, and tell them that he makes himself far too much at home in other people’s houses.’

‘You wouldn’t really do such a thing? It would be very cruel of you if you did, Roger!’

‘Not cruel at all! Lots of people will employ him on the strength of his having painted you, but none of my friends shall be let in for what they would consider a nuisance.’

‘A nuisance! It would be most unfair to prejudice people against him because he has spent a week or two here. He did not come without being invited, and we begged him to stay on because we liked him. It is his wife whom we like best—mother delights in her.’

'Your mother may delight in her, but I don't! She is a stupid, forward, ill-dressed schoolgirl! she's more like a schoolgirl than anything else!'

'Ill-dressed schoolgirl! Roger, you don't understand; those dresses of hers are made as they are on purpose. They are artistic.'

'That's what I complain of. When she is staying with gentlemen and ladies, she ought to do her best to make us forget that she is artistic. I call her abominably ill-dressed.'

'Well, I don't; but even if she were, you ought to remember that she has not much money to spend on clothes.'

'Then she ought not to come here! It is horrible to see anyone in those——'

Katherine turned on him almost fiercely, and said: 'What does it signify whether her dresses cost much or little? she always looks well in them.'

'But she doesn't, and in a house like this——' began Roger Hackblock.

'Roger, do say no more; I won't have it! I shall get really vexed!'

'I say, in a house like this, people should keep up a certain appearance; they should do so because the servants make such remarks, if for no other reason.'

Katherine looked at him in horror, and began to put her hands over her ears.

'Katherine, I don't understand you,' said he solemnly.

'That you certainly do not, or you would not talk as you do. Nancy Davenport is a dear woman; I am very fond of her. I have made her my friend, and I mean to keep her as my friend—so there!'

'*So there!* Is that the way you talk to me, Katherine? All I can say is, that you may make her your friend if you choose, for the present, but she shall never be a friend of mine.'

'How shall we do then?' she inquired provokingly, 'for I do not intend to give her up.'

'Talk to my mother about this,' said he.

'No; why should I do that, when I have a mother of my own I can talk to?'

Katherine knew quite well that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hackblock liked the Davenports. Mr. Hackblock sometimes walked through the studio and patronized Frank a little, and always spoke to Nancy as he would have spoken to his housemaid's sister, if he had been called on to address that young person. Mrs. Hackblock, in rich, dull-coloured silks and satins, was now and then tolerably civil to her, but usually swept past without particularly noticing her. All the Hackblocks thought the Davenports artistic vagrants, who were preying on the moneyed classes. Katherine Carey knew and resented this.

‘Katherine dear, I hardly know you to-day,’ said Roger.

‘I suppose I am rather ill-tempered, Roger ; but I am in earnest when I say that I mean to keep Mrs. Daveuport as a friend ; I like her, I pity her, and I want to help her.’

‘Well, we won’t quarrel about it now, Kitty,’ said he.

She was so handsome in her generous anger that, though he was firmly resolved to break off this silly friendship, he could for the moment do nothing but look admiringly at Katherine. She was magnificently beautiful, and as he looked, he felt that no one could see her without owning that Roger Hackblock had known how to choose a handsome wife. His words seemed to say that he only postponed the battle. Katherine either thought that he had yielded, or had no fear of not being able to make him do so hereafter. She talked to him for some time as if nothing had occurred. And yet something had occurred, which there was no chance of her ever forgetting. The contrast between the conduct of Messrs. Hackblock and Barrington with regard to Nancy had been set forth in strong relief before her, and signally to the disadvantage of her own betrothed. Barrington had thought with affectionate pity of the possible shortcomings in poor little Nancy’s raiment, and had chivalrously dedicated his own hard-worked-for earnings to the service of her health and beauty. Roger, with thousands to fling about at will, could find nothing better to do than sneer at this little lady of Nature’s own making, because her silks were not so thick as his mother’s, and her clothes not cut after a fashion familiar to him. Katherine thought a great deal about Barrington during these lovely, late October days in the country. Sometimes she was almost terrified to find how much she did think of him.

About a fortnight after this, the time came for the Careys to go home ; their tenancy had expired, and the season, though still very beautiful, was so far advanced that, for an invalid, town seemed preferable to the country. Katherine was not to return with them. The Hackblocks had put in their claim to have a short visit from her. They knew that she would not be allowed to stay long, but declared that ‘those Davenports and that picture had engrossed so much of her time that they had hardly seen her, and she must stay a few days with them.’ Their claim was admitted, and on the day that the Careys left Hazeldene, Katherine went to Stokesey Hall, where the Hackblocks intended to remain till Christmas. Mr. Hackblock, as before said, was a stern, iron-grey, rugged-looking man, pitiless and powerful. Mrs. Hackblock, a tall, spare, pale-faced lady, with a mind addicted to governing others. She had an object in inviting Katherine to Stokesey. She wished to take the first steps towards putting her future daughter-in-law into the way of playing her part as mistress there, when her own career of usefulness had drawn to a close. Not till Katherine took up her

abode with the Hackblocks did she know how much truth there was in the statement that she had been engrossed by the Davenport. There were so many things which she might easily have known, of which she had been entirely ignorant until she came to pay this little visit—the first she had ever paid the Hackblocks.

‘Who lives in that house?’ she asked, pointing to a square grey building on a well-wooded hillside.

‘Mr. Beauchamp,’ replied Mrs. Hackblock, with prim indifference.

‘Why don’t some of us know Mr. Beauchamp?’ inquired Katherine.

‘You must ask him that. He shuts himself up—never calls on new-comers.’

‘And that white house a little farther on, who lives there?’

‘The Cliffords live there.’

‘Are they nice?’

‘I suppose so. They have not called on us.’

Something in her tone made Katherine ask, ‘Why not?’

‘People of that kind don’t like calling on people like us. We have wealth and comfort, and they would like to have them too, but haven’t brains enough to get them for themselves. They have to be content with their old names and the little bit of money handed down by their fathers. Not that Hackblock is not a far better name than either Beauchamp or Clifford, only those people do not know it.’

‘Not really?’ said Katherine, rather incredulously.

‘My dear, yes. The Hackblocks were great people here long before William the Conqueror brought over that plundering band of scapegrace Normans. Hackblock is a grand old Norse name. It is the fashion to think it a fine thing to be descended from some vagrant Norman or other, and these Cliffords and Beauchamps take it upon themselves to despise us; but let them despise us as they like, we have plenty of solid comfort when we look about us.’

Mrs. Hackblock did look about her. She saw soft easy-chairs and couches covered with the most expensive brocade that could be bought, curtains whose very linings cost more than other people’s curtains, pictures which her husband, note-book in hand, had paraded along the line in the Royal Academy to buy, and had bought, not letting one which cost more than eight hundred guineas escape him, though not, perhaps, paying much attention to any other test of merit than position and price. She knew that the Cliffords had nothing on their walls but half a dozen dirty smoky-looking things which must already have done duty as pictures for centuries. Let the Beauchamps and the Cliffords be as exclusive as they liked, Hackblock, Higgins, Carey and Co. had nothing to gain from their acquaintance! Even if they had been friendly, the most that they would have done for the firm would have been to invite the Hack-

blocks to dinner once or twice a year ; and Mrs. Hackblock knew for a fact that they only kept one kitchen-maid apiece, and did not give their cooks half such high wages as she gave hers.

‘We know how to spend our money, and we know how to keep it,’ said Mrs. Hackblock.

She did know how to keep it, and she tried to impart her knowledge to Katherine. ‘Let me show you how my morning goes,’ said she, the day after Miss Carey’s arrival. ‘Busily enough, I can assure you, but I have always something to show for my work when it is over.’

Katherine sighed. As the late Lord Lytton would have said, it was the first time that the Beautiful had been confronted with the Actual, and the Beautiful did not like it.

‘Don’t sigh ; that is always a waste of time. Come with me and order dinner, and then it’s the morning for the beds.’

Katherine raised lovely but regretful eyes to the older lady’s face. She wondered what that could mean—she did not like the prospect before her.

‘It won’t take long, but I always do it once a month. Once a month, regularly, I see the beds made. It’s the only way to be sure that all is as it ought to be. If you don’t, your mattresses get deep trenches down the centre of them, and your blankets out of order ; and the servants see things going into holes, and just cover them up and say nothing. Mind you go your rounds, as I do, once a month.’ They ordered dinner, saw the beds made, returned to the morning-room, and then Mrs. Hackblock exclaimed, ‘I am five minutes behind my time for ringing for the eggs.’

Again Katherine’s eyes opened wide in wonder. She did not, however, feel sufficient interest in the matter to ask a question. Two men servants came in, each carrying a flat basket filled with lovely, white shining eggs. There was nothing rare about these eggs—all and severally they were the product of the domestic hen. They placed them on the table, together with an empty basket of the same kind ; rolled a chair forward, and then, with much ceremony, laid a gold pencil ready for Mrs. Hackblock’s use, and prepared to retire.

‘Place two chairs, and bring another pencil ; Miss Carey will assist me to-day,’ said Mrs. Hackblock, with much dignity. Katherine still could not imagine what this meant. Mrs. Hackblock glided solemnly to the table and said : ‘I like to have everything in my house done in an orderly manner. I hope when you and Roger are married you will have the same feeling. Your mother, my dear child, has been too much of an invalid to give you the required training ; you must allow me to supply her place. I love you as a mother, so I do not see why I should not. Look here, dear ; I take each egg in turn, one by one. I write on each the date of the day on which it was laid. Then there can be no mistake in

using them, for the cook has only to glance at them and see. You will help me, I am sure.'

'Most willingly,' said Katherine, wondering much whether the cook was a consenting party to this. 'Let me see—to-day is the 2nd November.'

'Ah, now you see the value of training. You have to approximate things a little. You can't, of course, get hens to be methodical. Some will lay their eggs a little earlier and some a little later in the day than the others; so I never can mark them all truly. I have them collected early in the morning, and mark them as if laid the day before. It's not quite a true way of doing it, but I can't find any that would both suit me and be more exact.'

They marked the eggs, November 1st. It was a pretty little employment enough, though rather monotonous; still, Katherine liked fingering eggs fresh enough to have a rosy gleam of light in them. 'What a number there are!' said she.

'There are not so many as usual. My hens lay on an average——'

'Oh, I know all about averages,' interrupted Katherine gaily. 'I can tell you all about them.'

'Then do tell me,' said Mrs. Hackblock.

'Well, after all, I am afraid I do not quite know what they are like—I mean, I can't quite describe the look of them; but I know that they are things hens do lay on!'

'You dear, sweet, little goose!' said Mrs. Hackblock, much pleased. 'What will Roger say when I tell him that?'

Katherine tossed her head; he would admire her, she knew. If she had perhaps shown ignorance, then he would see cause to admire ignorance. 'We have spent more than half an hour in doing this!' said she. 'Do you really do it every morning?'

'Yes, every morning. You can't do things one day, and leave them undone the next; you must go steadily on with them. There! It's done!' and so saying, she arose and rang the bell, and the two men came in again in solemn procession, removed the chairs, pencils, and eggs; in fact, destroyed all trace of the proceedings except the consciousness of a good action, and then disappeared.

'Now we will go to the fruit-room,' said Mrs. Hackblock; but first she rang the bell.

This time a maid came, bringing with her a warm Shetland shawl and a hood.

'Bring another shawl and hood. Miss Carey will assist me to-day.'

'Everything in this house seems capable of reduplication! Mrs. Hackblock used these very words when she spoke to the man half an hour ago!' thought Katherine, in whose mind the seeds of revolt were fast springing up.

A double supply of everything was brought; and the two ladies were warmly dressed before they went to the cold fruit-room.

It was a large room, built six or eight feet underground to escape frost, with rows of wide shelves all round it, on which were spread pears and apples.

Mrs. Hackblock at once applied herself to seeking out all that looked limp, or showed any signs of decay, and bade Katherine do the same.

'Put them on this shelf in the corner,' said she; 'and then they will be used first.'

'Did you say you did this every day?' exclaimed Katherine.

'Every day.'

'And the apples as well?'

'And the apples as well.'

'Can't the servants do it?'

'What servant would take the trouble?'

'I am sure I wouldn't!' said Katherine, who was wholly unused to hide her feelings.

'My dear, that's why I want to train you; your poor mother has never had the health to do it, or you would not talk in that way!'

Katherine made no reply. For once, indeed, this kind of thing rather amused her. Next day, too, she again went her rounds with Mrs. Hackblock. They visited the work-room; they cemented together a quantity of broken china; they spent nearly an hour in mending a store of old quill pens. On the third day, Katherine declined to do more; she understood everything that there was to understand, she said, and wanted to write some letters.

Mrs. Hackblock sighed gently, and forgave her. No one was ever really angry with Katherine. Roger had been called away to Paris the day before on business: Mrs. Hackblock supposed 'the dear child' wanted to write 'one of her pretty little letters to him.'

'Then we will wait till to-morrow,' said she; 'you will help me then?'

'To-morrow I am to go home!'

'Oh, but Mr. Hackblock means to call and see Mrs. Carey to-day, when he is in town, and beg her to let you stay with us two or three days longer!'

Katherine looked up as if about to speak.

'Don't say that you would prefer to leave us, Kitty—your visit is such a pleasure to us!'

'It is a pleasure to me too,' replied Katherine; but she was rather homesick.

'You may stay three days more,' said Mr. Hackblock, when he returned from London.

'Then I shall have time to make quite an expert housekeeper of you!' said his wife; and next day, as soon as breakfast was over, she pined to begin.

Katherine was reading a very long letter from her mother, which had just come.

‘Finish your letter, Katherine, and I will order dinner without you ; but you must help me with the eggs. By-the-bye, if I am not back here in a quarter of an hour, will you ring for them ?’ said Mrs. Hackblock, and went to her kitchen.

Katherine continued to read her mother’s tender and loving letter, in which unselfish affection breathed forth in every line. Suddenly she came to a passage which made her start : ‘That charming but odd Mr. Barrington came to call on me two days ago, just as if nothing had happened. I reproached him a little for having been so unfriendly to us for so long. I really do not quite know what he said in reply ; but, somehow or other, he made me feel that we had been foolish to think he had treated us ill—you see, we are quiet people, and do not remember how difficult it must be for anyone so busily employed as he is to come to us. I asked him to dine with us to-morrow—I thought you, my dear child, would be at home then, and said you would ; but Mr. Hackblock has just been here to say that he and his wife want to keep you longer. I feel sorry to have to give you up, but I look forward to Monday.’

Mr. Barrington had called ! Then he had kept his word ! He was going to dine at her father’s house that very evening ! What a pity she would not be at home ! But why should she not go ? Roger was not at Stokesey to miss her—there was nothing to keep her there ! Why should she lose the great pleasure of seeing Mr. Barrington ? Why stay away from her own dear mother for the sake of marking dates on eggs, or handling clammy pears ? Suddenly Mrs. Hackblock startled her by reappearing.

‘Katherine ! Katherine !’ she exclaimed, ‘I have been away twenty minutes, and you have forgotten to ring for the eggs !’

‘Bother the eggs !’ was what Katherine was tempted to reply, but she restrained herself, and said, ‘I forgot : I am so sorry. Mrs. Hackblock, my mother is disappointed that I am not going home to-day—I ought to go.’

‘Oh, I am sure Mrs. Carey won’t mind your staying till Monday !’

‘Oh no, I must not stay ! I must go to-day. Please let me go !’

The *please* was an immense concession to Mrs. Hackblock’s age and position as her future mother-in-law. As a rule, Katherine merely stated her wishes. Her wish was always law, and none the less so now than heretofore. She said she wanted to go home, and she did go.

CHAPTER XIII.

'How now, my love? Why are your cheeks so pale?
How chance the roses there to pale so fast?'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

'A day in April never came so sweet,
To show how costly Summer was at hand.'
Merchant of Venice.

It was May once more, and Mrs. Carey's sitting-room was enlivened by rays of warm, bright sunshine. Young, golden-green leaves waved against her window, crossing and recrossing, and casting fleeting sunlit shadows on each other. She could watch them from her sofa, and, beyond them, she could see the tops of some trees in the first radiance of spring-green. How green they did look against the bright blue sky! how blue the sky looked against such vivid green!

Mrs. Carey lay still, and enjoyed all she saw; and never once thought how hard it was that she should be obliged to stay within stone walls, when all outside was so fresh and delightful. She was, indeed, thankful to be alive at all. She was still in the same dangerous state as when her doctors had said that she could not live more than a year; but, strange to say, her disease had made no progress. She and her husband were aware that she was under sentence of death.

Katherine had never allowed herself to believe in the danger; but had at last begun to accept the fact that her dear mother must pass through life on a lower level of health than all around her, and to hope that, even on those terms, some happiness worthy of the name might fall to her lot.

They had been sitting together for some time, when Mrs. Carey said, rather anxiously:

'Katherine, my dearest child, I am sure you are not well. I have been thinking about you for some time. You are so pale, and you don't talk so much as you used to do. I am afraid you spend too much time in this room of mine. You really ought to go out more!'

'I do go out more,' replied Katherine, with a slight change of colour; 'I always go out at eleven instead of twelve now.'

'That's right! Spend as much time in the open air as you possibly can. I always notice that you look much brighter when you come in—always. Don't look guilty about that, dear child. You hang your head and seem to think it quite a crime to look a little better for being taken out of your mother's sick-room. It is quite natural that you should do so—quite right to enjoy fresh air. You want change. Now that Roger is away, you have hardly anyone to speak to but myself and poor little Cosette.'

'Indeed, mother, I am perfectly happy. You would not have me

go out every night to balls and concerts, and leave you alone, would you ?

‘You are a dear, good girl,’ replied Mrs. Carey ; ‘I would have you just as you are !’

‘I am not good,’ said Katherine, with strange warmth. ‘Anything but that.’

‘When does Roger return ?’ inquired Mrs. Carey, paying no attention whatever to this petulant outburst.

Katherine and Katherine’s love were the joys of her life ; but she feared that Katherine’s own life was a dull one, especially when Roger was away. He had gone over to Hamburg to establish a new branch of the business, and had already been absent for three months.

‘I am not quite sure when he does come,’ replied Katherine calmly. ‘He did say something about being here very soon, but I believe, if he comes now, he will have to go back for a while.’

‘Katherine, my darling, you are a good, loving daughter to me—don’t think that I am not grateful to you for it. You would have been married now, and happy with dear Roger, if you had not been unselfish, and stayed with me. I am afraid——’

‘Oh, mother, mother !’ said Katherine, ‘don’t praise me so when I don’t deserve it. I don’t want to leave you—I should be wretched if I did !’

Mrs. Carey wondered if her poor child had at last arrived at some knowledge of the painful truth, and was aware how short was the time which was left for them to be together. She had always steadily refused to believe it before, but she spoke now as if aware of the worst. Mrs. Carey thought it wise to change the subject.

‘Go out, dear,’ said she, ‘go and get some roses in your cheeks.’

Katherine got up, slowly and heavily, came to her mother’s side, stooped down, and took her hand, kissed it very humbly, and went out without saying a word. Something in her manner struck Mrs. Carey as strange. At first she puzzled herself to account for it, but why should she do so ? If Katherine had recognised the truth, that would explain her changed manner ; and perhaps it was as well that she did know—it would make the shock of separation less terrible. Mrs. Carey, who might have been said to exist on the sight of her daughter, was, during her absence, apt to lie on her sofa, thinking how the dear child had looked when she said this, or when she did that, and smiling with pleasure at her little store of recollections of this kind, until Katherine came back and supplied her with fresh food for thought ; and this was what she did now.

Katherine’s thoughts were very different. ‘I am a deceitful wretch,’ thought she, as she came downstairs ready dressed to go out, ‘but it’s not quite my fault. If poor dear mother were but like other people, and well, I would not hide a single thought from her ; as it is, I must.’ She went slowly down the garden. Cosette

tripped steadily after her. Cosette looked up anxiously, Cosette wagged her tail, Cosette did all in her power to obtain some notice ; but Katherine never once looked at her. 'I don't think I ought to do this,' thought she, as she walked on towards the park. 'I wonder whether it is very wrong? After all, if it is, it hurts no one but myself!'

She was on her way to meet Lewis Barrington, and she had met him in the same place, and at the same time, nearly every day for many weeks. They had seen a great deal of each other during the winter, both at Mr. Carey's house and elsewhere ; they had from time to time met out of doors by accident, and had afterwards met occasionally by arrangement, to consult together in secret about the play he was writing for her. It was so easy to meet when he knew so exactly the hour at which she left home for a walk, and when she adhered to it so punctually. At first there had been no actual appointment made ; after a while, when they knew each other better, and when it became more and more vital to their happiness that they should meet, it had seemed so easy and so natural to say, 'Good-bye till to-morrow ;' and for many weeks now, neither the one nor the other had ever failed to be there, unless the day was hopelessly wet. And now, instead of spending one hour in the park, they never spent less than two. Katherine knew—could not help knowing—that she loved him more than she had ever imagined it possible to love any human being. Until she knew and loved him she had had no conception of the meaning of the words 'love' and 'happiness.' It was not all happiness. On the rare occasions when she allowed herself to think of the dark side of the affair, she was forced to look in the face the fact that he and she could never be more to each other than they were now—indeed, could not long be even so much. When Roger returned, things would be different. She belonged to him, and he would assert his claim. She might perhaps sometimes see Mr. Barrington, but never so freely and so happily as now. It was true Roger never expected to see her in the morning—never, indeed, had time to do so—but still all would be different when he came back. This was a brief space of pure delight which must soon be at an end ; the wonder was that it had lasted so long. Meantime, in order to enjoy it more thoroughly, she thrust into the background as much as possible every accusation of her own conscience, every thought which bore on the future.

She never attempted to analyze Barrington's feelings for herself ; at least, she only did so to this extent. She felt that he had an affection for her of some kind—of what kind she knew not, and hardly cared to ask. It was enough to make her supremely happy. When she thought on the subject at all, she supposed that he was still engaged to that girl. A cold chill came over her when she remembered her—a chill she herself could not explain. It was not caused by envy, for Barrington had given her more friendship

already than she had ever even ventured to hope for; it was not jealousy, for she was too humble to think she could dispute the possession of him with one so superior as the girl must be. It was not guilt at the thought that she herself might possibly be supplanting this other—she did not feel that she was doing so, or dream that such a thing could be possible. She did not even wish it; no thought or feeling ever dwelt in her mind beyond the one fact that it was a daily delight to be in his company, to look up to him, and to listen to him. He was very good and kind to her, bore with her foolish little talk, nay, even appeared to like it; and probably felt like a tolerably affectionate elder brother to her. Let him continue to do so. She would enjoy to the full the joy of loving him, and would hide her love from all. She felt quite able to hide it from him, and from everyone else, but wholly unequal to giving it up. Gratitude alone would have made her love him. It was so 'awfully kind of a man of his name and rank in the world to be so good and patient with a poor little stay-at-home, untaught girl like herself.' Just as this thought was passing through her mind for the thousandth time, she met him.

'What do you think?' said he, after he had welcomed her. 'This is the anniversary of the day when I first saw you?'

'Then we have known each other a year—a whole year!' and having said that, one of those silences so frequent with lovers took place. She was counting up the joys which knowing him had brought into her life; he could always fill up a pause of almost any length, by letting his eyes dwell lingeringly on the delicate lines of that now well-known face.

'It was at our house,' she said, after a while. 'I remember it perfectly. I was just standing with papa inside the doorway. I had done nothing but shake hands with people for about an hour, and was getting tired of it, when I saw Mrs. Dalrymple and a tall gentleman coming. I remember so well seeing you then; I remember exactly how you looked. I wonder what you thought of me? Wasn't it odd, that we who lived so near should never see each other until that day? I wonder what put it into Mrs. Dalrymple's head to bring you?'

Barrington smiled. 'Didn't you know that I asked her to bring me? I had seen you for a minute or two that afternoon, and wanted to see you again.'

Katherine had not known this, and it was another delightful thing to muse on for another silent five minutes. She and he were accustomed to these long silences; to her they made up a great part of the pleasure of her morning walks; to him they frequently came as a safeguard after a moment of too great expansion. She had kept her secret well. He had no conception how much she loved him! He knew that she must have some feeling of regard for him, or she would not have been there; but it fell immeasurably short

of what he wished her to have, for almost every time he saw her she let fall some words which showed that she looked on this friendship of theirs as something of limited duration, and knew that the dam would soon come when he and she would see each other no more. Roger Hackblock was never actually named, and yet no day went by without something being said which proved that she considered herself bound to him for life. This being the case, Barrington was afraid to say anything which would open her eyes to the true state of his feeling for her, and perhaps drive her to eschew his companionship from that time forth. And yet each day brought him nearer to the danger of speaking these words. For days he had constantly been on the very verge of uttering them; for days he had told himself that he could not keep silence much longer, but must tell her all and risk the very worst that could happen, and never had he been so near to doing this as to-day.

‘Mother says I look ill,’ said Katherine, who felt that something ought to be said, and was unable to originate anything. ‘You don’t think so, do you?’

It would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to have studied the aspect of her face—coloured as it suddenly was by a rosy blush at the thought that she had thus unintentionally asked him to look at her—and have said that there was any hint of illness in it; on the contrary, it was warmly tinged with the very hue of health. He could not tell whether her eyes were bright or not, for almost before he could look up, hers had sought the ground.

‘Oh no; you do not look ill. You do not feel so, I hope,’ he added anxiously.

‘I? Not the very least. I’ll tell you who does look rather ill, though—that is poor dear Nancy.’

‘Yes, but she is stronger than she was. She has been better since you sent the carriage every day to take her for a drive—that was very kind of you!’ said he tenderly. He did not feel brotherly to Katherine, but he felt very much so towards Nancy, and, independently of any other sentiment for Katherine, was deeply grateful to her for her thoughtfulness on this point.

She put his gratitude away from her as undeserved, and said, ‘Oh, not kind at all; the horses want exercise—the carriage is never used. I don’t care to go out without mother. Nancy may as well have the good of it as not. How odd it is that Mr. Davenport does not sometimes get anxious about her!’

‘She is in no danger,’ said Barrington. ‘She only wants a little luxury now and then. I used to be afraid that she was consumptive, but she is all right. Won’t she be in a state of delight on Monday, when she goes to the Royal Academy and sees her husband’s pictures in such capital places? He has two on the line; I saw him on the varnishing-day, and he told me so. If that man’s fortune is made, it will all be due to you, and to your goodness in sitting to him.’

Katherine smiled. That had been the one good deed of her life—the one and only occasion on which she had made herself do a thing which she disliked for the sake of another person.

Presently she said: 'I am going to the Academy on Monday with the Davenports. Mrs. Hackblock is going to take me to the Private View this afternoon, but I want to go on Monday too, for the sake of hearing what poor little Nancy says;' and as she uttered these words, she felt that meant seeing Barrington there also.

'You are going on Monday? At what time?' he asked.

'In the afternoon; about two, I believe.'

She watched him as he made a mental note of this one more opportunity of being in her company. She felt a happy warmth at her heart. It was very delightful that he should care so much to be with her. Suddenly she thought of that *other*. Was she—could she be wronging *her*? It was not so strange that Katherine should put this question to herself as it may appear. Her admiration for Barrington was so unbounded, her trust in him so implicit, that to suppose he could in any way behave ill to this lady, or indeed to anyone, was to treat him with a disrespect which was simply monstrous; it was so certain that he could have no feeling for herself which was inconsistent with his own high sense of honour and with his plighted troth. Not for anything in the wide world would Katherine have doubted him; nevertheless, when all at once it became so evident that he intended to go to the Royal Academy next Monday afternoon, simply because she herself was going, she could not prevent the thought of that *other* rushing unbidden into her mind. It was impossible not to think of that girl who had such a strong will and strong influence over Lewis Barrington, and also such a strong claim on him. The force of the necessity which made Katherine think of her, made her for a time forget herself and her own relations with him, and say boldly:

'Mr. Barrington, you once told me that you were not quite free to see me, that you could not come to our house as you liked. How is it that you can do as you like now? Does she not object to it now?'

'I dare say she does, but I told her I could not be bound by promises. But I did not know that you knew about it. Has she ever spoken to you of it?' he asked, in the greatest surprise, for he was thinking of the promise he had made to Mrs. Dalrymple, and she had assured him that she would not speak of that to Katherine.

'Spoken to me!' echoed Katherine, much bewildered. 'What do you mean? Who is she? How could she speak to me, when I don't know her?'

'You don't know her! You know her quite well!'

'Then do tell me who she is!' said Katherine, eager and not eager, pressing for knowledge which, on the whole, she would have given a great deal not to have.

‘Mrs. Dalrymple, of course,’ said he.

‘Mrs. Dalrymple! But she has got a husband!’

‘Why should she not have a husband?’

‘Because—because—it can’t be Mrs. Dalrymple! Didn’t you say that you were not quite free to do as you liked, because——’ here she hesitated painfully.

‘Do go on,’ said he kindly; ‘you need not mind what you say to me; and it is so important that we should understand each other.’

‘I can’t say more!’ said Katherine, who was conscious that tears of shame were forcing themselves into her eyes, and feared that he must think her a silly, childish schoolgirl. She had so lately been a schoolgirl, that this was a most terrible thought to her, and it gave her courage to say, ‘Yes, I will tell you.’ And then, under the protection of downcast eyes, she continued, with a certain degree of firmness: ‘I understood—I thought I understood, I mean—that you were engaged to a girl, or a grown-up lady perhaps, who did not quite like you to be too much with other people—girls, you know.’

‘You did?’ said he, in amazement. ‘You thought that? How could I be engaged when I love——’ here he checked himself abruptly—most abruptly; and Katherine, though she never raised her eyes from the ground, knew that his were piercing her through and through. His gaze lasted so long that she faltered, and grew crimson under it.

‘Won’t you even look at me?’ said he.

She made a great effort and looked in his face; their eyes met and told all.

She recovered first, and said very nervously: ‘I was wrong, you say; I beg your pardon.’

‘Wrong! you were never more wrong in your life! I engaged? Impossible! I who——’

‘Don’t let us say another word about it, Mr. Barrington, I entreat you,’ interrupted Katherine, in anxious haste. ‘It was my mistake, that’s all. I think I must go home.’

She was so pale, and grew so much paler each moment, that he was afraid she was going to faint.

‘You are not angry with me?’ he asked, though it seemed cruel to say more.

By a great effort she was able to answer ‘No,’ and, having obtained so much, he ceased to press her further. He made her take his arm, and gently guided her into the path which led homewards; and then, as they slowly and painfully moved onwards, he received some portion of his punishment. The sight of her drooping head, her faltering steps, her wan white face, with all its youth and health driven away from it by him and his rash words, stabbed him to the heart. She was such a child, and had done what was, perhaps, wrong, in such perfect innocence and ignorance. Now she knew

what she had done ! He had suddenly disclosed to her sight the precipice on which she had been amusing herself so thoughtlessly, and had brought the first chill blight on her happy young life !

He had time enough for reflection ; for, as he took her back to her own home, no word crossed her lips. Was she wholly unable to speak to him ? Was she angry with him ? He must have a word of some kind from her before they parted ; for, let what would happen—in spite of conscience, and of her engagement, of her regret and penitence—in spite of all, and everything, this woman should be his.

After all, what had he said to shock her so now ?—Nothing. Not one word of love had actually been spoken. There was no reason why they should not meet next day as if nothing had happened. Nothing had happened, except something which was so delightful, that his brain reeled when he thought of it—that one look which had passed between them, and had told so much. How much had it told to her ? he wondered. How much of what those dear eyes of hers had said to him would she abide by ? If he could but find some way to induce her to say one word which would show that she had not made up her mind never to see him again !

They reached the green garden-door. She quietly withdrew from his arm her hand, which had been lying on it like a dead hand no longer capable of any feeling ; and, with her face still downcast, and studiously averted from him, began to search helplessly in her pocket for the latch-key. At last she found it, and tried to open the door. She could not, and felt that she could not ; so, with a sickly attempt at something like a smile, she turned and put the key into Barrington's hand, as if saying, 'Help me. Do it for me.'

He opened the door without delay, and then said :

'Are you better ?'

'Much,' said she, though she was not ; and then she prepared to go.

'One moment,' said he, in desperation. 'I did so want to speak to you about the play, and have neglected to do so until too late. I must have a little talk with you about it before I can get on any further.'

He thought that if she said, 'We will talk about it to-morrow,' it would be a sign that all was still well between them ; but if she seemed disinclined to hear more of it, all would be over. She faltered a moment, and said :

'I can't think now ; I——'

'Oh, not now !' said he, overjoyed ; 'I don't mean now, when you are so ill. I am not so selfish as that.'

'Some other day, then. Good-bye !'

And thus she left him, gliding away like a pale shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

'For many men that stumble at the threshold,
Are well foretold that danger lurks within.'

King Henry VI.

'Riddling confession finds but riddling shift.'

Romeo and Juliet.

KATHERINE crept into the house, made her way to her own room, and flung herself wearily on the bed. She was simply overwhelmed by the mental emotion she had undergone. She could not think at all; she felt almost annihilated. Her mind was bruised; her spirit faint; her body powerless. She drew the curtain before her, and lay quite still, wondering if ever again she would be able to think clearly.

After some time, a servant came to call her to her lonely little luncheon.

'I want no luncheon,' she said. 'I want nothing; only let me be quiet.'

'But you look so ill, Miss Katherine!' exclaimed the frightened girl. 'What am I to say to Mrs. Carey if she asks where you are?'

'Say I am rather tired. Be sure not to let her imagine that I am ill. I am not ill. Promise not to say I am.'

The maid promised, and stole away. Katherine's pale face alarmed her—no one had ever seen Miss Carey so tired or so ill before—and her one thought was, 'She's going like her mother.'

Katherine lay where she was; but more than an hour passed before any thought of any kind relieved the blankness of her mind. When she did begin to think, the thoughts which presented themselves were happy and soothing. There she lay, recalling all that had taken place that morning—seeing once more that look in his eyes as she had seen it then—hearing once more the words which he had spoken. He had looked at her very strangely—had spoken very strangely, too. She did not quite know what he had meant; but she knew that for words and looks, such as those which he had given her, she would have gone barefooted to the end of the earth. Was it—could it be possible—that he loved her? He had said he loved some one; was she the one? She did not know; but she thought of his words and his looks, until she forgot to think of anything else. They were the very breath of life to her—dearer far than life itself. On other days, after seeing Barrington, she had almost always come home reproaching herself for behaving with something very like treachery to Roger Hackblock. To-day she had no room in her mind for any thought but one—not only had she forgotten that she had promised to go out that very afternoon with his mother, but she had forgotten that there was such a person as his mother in the world.

There was a loud peal at the bell. She vaguely heard it ; but it never occurred to her that it was Mrs. Hackblock, who had come to fetch her. What a loud peal it was ! It roused even Lewis Barrington on the opposite side of the street. He heard it, and looked out of his window, and saw Mrs. Hackblock's shining, newly-varnished carriage, and magnificent pair of greys, and knew that she had come to take Katherine Carey to the Private View of the Royal Academy. He rose up in great irritation, and said to himself that she ought to teach that bedizened footman of hers how to ring a bell properly ! 'Blacking can't be expected to teach its servants anything of the kind !' was his next scornful thought ; and then he recollected that the Careys were blacking-people, too, and that even 'the most immaculate white and red' of his beloved Katherine's cheek was nurtured on that repulsive and Circean-looking compound. Was Katherine going to the Private View with that gaunt commercial-woman, who always wore dresses which looked as if smeared with the contents of five or six bottles of Hackblock, Higgins, and Carey's best and costliest article ? Would Katherine be well enough to go ? If she did, what a pity he could not go too ! He was almost certain that Katherine would not. He was right. Mrs. Hackblock said she would 'just get out and say a few words to Mrs. Carey, while Miss Carey was putting on her bonnet ;' but was told that Miss Carey had a very bad headache, and could not go out.

'She will be better perhaps if she makes an effort,' said Mrs. Hackblock to Katherine's maid, who came forward to endorse the man-servant's assurances. 'I know the air will do her head a great deal of good, and I'll run upstairs to her room for a minute, and tell her so !'

The girl looked dismayed when she heard of this intention of Mrs. Hackblock's, but that lady's silks were so strikingly luminous and rich of texture, and the laces and fringes which adorned them were used in such generous abundance, that it was out of the question to try to place any impediments in her way.

'Ill, my dearest Katherine ?' said she, as with hasty steps she swept across the room to a chair by the sufferer's side. 'What is it ? A headache ?'

'Yes, a little headache—only a little one, but it is very bad !'

'I see it is, poor dear ! You had better get up and come out with me. We will drive once round the park before we go to the pictures—that will cure you.'

'Oh no ; I'll stay here, please.'

'But I can't let you stay here, all alone ! I don't like to think of your doing that. Suppose I send the carriage back for my knitting, and stay with you for an hour or so ? I must have something in my hands, but I can easily do that.'

Katherine shook her head.

'Don't shake your head. I am sure that it will be an immense comfort to have some one like me with you. We can have a happy little talk together about Roger.'

'Not to-day ; I couldn't, thank you,' murmured poor Katherine.

'Head too bad ? Well, I won't insist. I am very good about not insisting on things against people's will. Are you sure you go out enough ? Katherine, it is a duty to go out—don't forget that. You are apt to forget your duties of that kind, I fear !'

Katherine hid her face. Every word Mrs. Hackblock said had its own separate and subtle sting of reproach.

'I'll put some eau de Cologne on your forehead. Have you had any *sal volatile* ?'

Faintly, but firmly, Katherine declined all these remedies.

'But what will Roger say if he comes home and finds you ill ? You looked so well when he went away. He won't expect to find you changed.'

Katherine hastily assured her that her headache would be gone in an hour or two.

'I dare say it will, but when you are well we must keep you so. I will go to your mother on my way downstairs, and tell her that you must go out more. You must go out, if it is only for a short walk in the park. I wish you had some one to walk with, though. Here you are, in this dull house from morning till night, seeing no one but your father and mother. I dare be certain that you have not exchanged a word with anyone else for days. Now, have you, dear ? I wish Roger was back ; he makes things much livelier for you. I am old, and no good, and you hardly ever see anyone who is not old.'

'You are not old ; you are very good,' murmured the unhappy girl.

'Oh, I'm no good whatsoever, except to scold you a little now and then. By-the-bye, I was going to give you a little scolding now, if you had been well, my darling. Roger—I had a long letter from him this morning—complains that you have not written one of your dear little letters to him for days—I don't know how many. I was going to make you promise to write at once.'

'Does Roger call them "dear" little letters ?' she inquired in some surprise, for not only was this epithet warmer than he was wont to employ, but also she was afraid that her recent letters had been entirely undeserving of such a description.

'No, it's my word ; but I am sure Roger likes to have them. You will write to him, won't you ? Not to-day—you can't to-day.'

'No, I can't to-day,' Katherine repeated drearily.

'I know you can't. You are not able, and I forbid it.'

To Mrs. Hackblock, a letter seemed to represent a literary effort of appreciable magnitude. So she again said : 'You are not fit to do it yet, but I will give up a morning or an afternoon to write to

him. Is there anything you want to say to him—anything that really ought to be said to him at once, I mean?

Mrs. Hackblock meant nothing particular, she was only forecasting a little in case Katherine should not be well enough to write even on the following day; but her chance speech probed Katherine's conscience in the tenderest and most injured part.

Was there anything which really ought to be said to Roger at once? Alas! indeed there was!

'Think carefully, dear,' said Mrs. Hackblock.

Katherine was thinking—thinking hard. She loved Barrington. She did not love Roger. Now that she had at last learnt what love was, she knew that she had no feeling for him which was one whit stronger than friendly interest. The sight of him had never quickened the pulses of her heart by even so much as one beat.

Mrs. Hackblock was rather surprised at her silence, and said: 'Come, Katherine dear, I must go; tell me something or other to say to Roger. I am sure the horses must be tired of waiting.'

'I will write myself! I must write!' murmured Katherine.

'Good-bye then, my darling,' said Mrs. Hackblock, and she kissed her tenderly, and went.

'Is there anything which really ought to be said to Roger?' repeated Katherine, dwelling on those words with deep emotion.

'Yes. Oh, how I wish it were but said!'

She got up, smoothed her hair, and went slowly and thoughtfully down to her mother's room.

Mrs. Carey looked up in anxious surprise, and said: 'Oh, Katherine, I am so glad to see you! I have done nothing but reproach myself ever since I was told that you had a bad headache. It's my fault! I almost drove you out of doors this morning when you didn't want to go; and I saw you didn't.'

'I did want to go. I was just going when you sent me,' said Katherine, longing to tell all.

'It is such a pity you went!' continued Mrs. Carey. 'It would have been so very much better for you, if you had but stayed in!'

A strange pain and fear thrilled through Katherine's sad heart. How ominous and how apposite were most of the words which were addressed to her this day! She earnestly hoped that these of her mother's were not true—in any sense deeper than at first appeared. She assured her that she was well again. She went and sat down on a low foot-stool by her side, but she half turned away her face from her.

'Mother,' said she faintly, 'I want to talk to you about something—something I can't help making myself unhappy about; a little unhappy, I mean. Don't be afraid that it is anything bad.'

Mrs. Carey's hand stole softly into Katherine's, and held it tightly in a warm and loving grasp.

'It is about Roger; sometimes I am afraid I do not love him

properly. Would it be a very dreadful thing if I really did not, and could not go on being engaged to him ?

Mrs. Carey started back in great distress, and still greater surprise, and exclaimed : ' You don't mean to say that there is any chance of such a dreadful thing as that happening ? What would your father say ?

' That's the worst of it ! I think girls should choose for themselves when they are asked to promise to marry a man—they have to live with him, not the fathers and mothers. You and father chose Roger for me ! I myself had no voice in the matter !

Mrs. Carey gently drew away her hand from Katherine's and hid her eyes with it, but could not hide some tears that trickled out from beneath her fingers.

' Mother ! Mother !' exclaimed Katherine. ' Don't do that ! It is terrible to make one's own mother cry ! I never said I wanted to break off with Roger ! I was only wondering whether I loved him enough. Oh, mother ! don't go on crying—you kill me !

' Assure me that you have not changed towards Roger, or I shall never be happy again ! I have been so happy in the thought that though I myself was going to be taken from you, darling, you would not feel my loss so much as might be feared ; for you would have a good, kind husband, and his father and mother would be parents to you.'

' But I want to keep you,' sobbed Katherine.

' You cannot keep me, and losing me may mean losing your dear father, too ; he is an old man, Katherine, too old to adjust himself to a new kind of life when I am gone. If you give up Roger, I shall have the agony of thinking that very soon you may be quite alone in the world.'

Katherine hid her face against the corner of the sofa and wept quietly ; but in the midst of her tears she made a great effort and said : ' Mother, I am not going to give him up, or do anything which would distress you.'

' It would distress me terribly,' said Mrs. Carey. ' When you are as old as I am, and have daughters of your own, you will know how dreadful it is to a poor mother to think of leaving the darling of her heart alone and unprotected, and will understand how I snatched at the chance of marrying you to dear Roger, whose parents have loved you almost as their own daughter ever since you were born. They could never love any other daughter-in-law as they will love you, and you could never be so much at home with anyone as with them. Katherine, dear, it is quite hard enough to have to die and leave you, when I know I am leaving you safe and happy. What would it be to lie here day after day, feeling my own life going so fast, and knowing nothing of what yours would be after I was parted from you ? I should spend my time in imagining all kinds of dreadful things happening to you ; and I should be doubly wretched, because I should know that it was all my own doing !

‘Your own doing? Dear mother, how could that be?’

‘Because, a year ago, when you accepted Roger, you were quite happy, and willing to marry him at once, and I begged him to wait. I entreated him to leave you with me while I lived. You remember that the doctors told us then that I could not live more than a year, and I was selfish and couldn’t give you up while that year lasted.’

‘The doctors knew nothing about it! I did not believe what they said at the time; and now they are proved to have been wrong. You are just as well as you were when they said that; and you will live many a year yet, thank God!’

‘That I certainly shall not! Katherine, my days are numbered, and I know it.’

‘Oh, mother, no! Oh, what dreadful things these are to talk of! I can’t bear it.’

‘We won’t talk of them. Only relieve my mind about dear Roger. What did you mean by what you said just now? Do you really love him less?’

‘Oh no, I don’t,’ replied Katherine; and she spoke truly, for she had never loved him at all. But even if it had been false she would have said it, for she was resolved at any cost not to embitter her mother’s last months of life.

‘Thank God!’ murmured Mrs. Carey. ‘If this engagement were broken off it would almost kill your father. I am certain it would! He wishes you to marry Roger even more than I do.’

Katherine shivered; each moment she felt herself more and more enmeshed by chains which were irksome to her.

‘Give me some *sal volatile*, Katherine. I feel quite faint,’ said Mrs. Carey.

‘Yes, mother,’ said Katherine, rising in haste to obey; ‘and have no fear about Roger. I love him quite as much as ever I did; I was only afraid that that might not be quite enough.’

‘Oh, all girls take fancies of that kind. You love him quite enough. You have always been very happy together.’

Katherine drew a long breath. She had narrowly escaped a very great danger—that of making her poor mother really ill—but she had lost this opportunity of telling her the truth.

CHAPTER XV.

‘She leads in solitude her youthful hours,
Her nights are restlessness, her days are pain:
Oh, when will health and pleasure come again?’

LANDOR.

‘YOU and my father chose Roger for me; I myself had no voice in the matter.’ These had been Katherine’s words; and though the fact was not absolutely in accordance with them, it was more so than Mrs. Carey liked to think. Katherine had uttered them boldly,

and had believed them ; but when she retreated to her own room again and thought over what she had said, she was compelled to own that there was less truth in that assertion than was altogether satisfactory to her own feelings. She had not only accepted Roger Hackblock of her own free will—for no pressure had been brought to bear on her stronger than strong persuasion—but she had also for some time been very happy and proud of him. So it had been before she was so fascinated by Lewis Barrington, and so perhaps it would be again, when her friendship with him came to an end, as only too surely it must come. Half a dozen words with her mother had convinced Katherine that her engagement had gone too far, and that the two families were much too deeply anxious about it to suffer it to be broken off. There was no contending against her mother. She would do her best to feel for Roger as she used to do. When she saw Mr. Barrington again, she would be much more guarded with him. Roger would come back, and all would once more be as of old. So she told herself, and so she almost believed. On Saturday morning the sun shone brightly, but Katherine never left the house. She was perfectly well, she said, but she had no wish to go out.

On Sunday she and her father went as usual to church, and as usual took a short walk in the park. By chance Mr. Carey chose the very path where she and Barrington had walked so short a while before. Her eyes rested on the same familiar objects, her feet grazed the same pebbles—all was the same—but with such a difference ! What was she to do on Monday ? She thought of this during the night-watches. In round terms she told herself that it would be wrong to meet Barrington again—so wrong that it must not be thought of. Hard as it was to deny herself this great pleasure, it must be done. But how was she to endure her dull sad life, when compelled to forego the only happiness she had ? A compromise suggested itself which made her quite happy. She would not renounce the pleasure of seeing Barrington altogether, but she would not see him for some time to come. She would allow a little time for him to forget what had occurred, and then meet him as usual.

Soothed by this thought, she fell asleep, and slept so long that she was late for breakfast. She and her father always enjoyed that meal together. When she went down, he was absorbed in the *Times*: so she began to read a letter from Nancy, written on the preceding Saturday.

‘ Frank and I, my dearest Katherine, will call for you on our way to the R. A. at two on Monday ; please be ready. We shall have had luncheon, thank you ; for I know that as you read that we are to be with you at that time, you are mentally offering it to us. Frank is in such spirits about his pictures ! Have you heard how well they are hung ? I can’t help hoping that they are certain to sell. I have persuaded him to put a good price on them, and tell

him he is sure to get it. He says he would much rather not sell them, except to truly appreciative buyers. Such buyers are rare, but Frank is terribly sanguine. He says that I am terribly faint-hearted and unbelieving. Can you imagine why? Because I was rather cross with him, poor fellow, about something he did this afternoon. You see, dear Katherine, those pictures may not sell, so don't you agree with me in thinking that it was rather naughty of him to go out all unbeknown to me, and buy me two magnificent necklaces—one amber, and it must have cost five or six guineas, and the other lapis lazuli—and I so badly off for a new set of flannel-petticoats, as I told him when he came home? He informed me that I had a prisoned soul which refused to rise. I said I liked to see the steps. Of course I can't be really angry with him, any more than he with me; so don't imagine that we have been saying unkind things to each other. He says that he has made four hundred guineas already by buying that bed; he will count up the money as if the truly appreciative purchasers had already been found. Well, Frank says he has made that, and will make the value of those necklaces twenty times over, by painting me wearing them. I dare say all will be right, and the amber is lovely; but, dear Katherine, you must sympathize with me. Be warned by me—never marry a man like my dear Frank, who will steal all my cinnamon to burn in his studio fire, and make the room smell sweet and sacrificial. Only too much so, say I; and then he laughs, and says I am hopelessly practical! He declares that he means to make it a condition that whoever buys those pictures shall keep a lamp burning beneath them day and night. I hope you do not require to have it explained to you that this is not intended as a tribute to the merit of the painter, but as a homage to the beauty of the dear lady who played the part of model to him. I say, supposing the pictures are bought by a dealer, will a dealer engage to keep a couple of lamps continually burning before them? On which my Frank flies out at once, and swears by all his gods, not forgetting his pretty goddesses as well, that no dealer shall be allowed to purchase any attempt, however abortive, to delineate a woman of your surpassing beauty. I maintain that a dealer's cheque will buy just as many nice things as anyone else's cheque. He says I do not look on things in a high, religious spirit. I, on the contrary, affirm——'

Here Mr. Carey interrupted Katherine's reading by exclaiming:

'Oh! my word, Katherine, but that is a long letter! Who can have taken the trouble to sit down and cover all that paper?'

'Nancy Davenport. She wants me to go to the Academy with them, and the rest of it is all about her husband's pictures. Papa, couldn't you buy them? It would be dreadful for the poor Davenports if no one bought them! I wish you would, dear.'

'I'd like nothing better; but it wouldn't do. You are quite forgetting that Mr. Hackblock wants them. He would take it very

much amiss if I stepped in and interfered with his arrangements.'

'I hate his arrangements! Why does he not buy them at once, if he wants them? He has behaved very ill——'

'Gently, Katherine, gently,' interposed Mr. Carey mildly; but in his heart he did not think his daughter was saying one word too much.

The fact was, that Mr. Hackblock had been twice to see the two pictures, and had privately said to the Careys that he liked them both particularly, and intended to purchase them. He had, however, expressed no admiration to the artist himself; partly because 'he didn't approve of making young artists conceited,' and partly because he thought if he seemed indifferent he would probably get them for a less price.

'He wants two hundred guineas apiece for them now,' Mr. Hackblock had said, 'and he is an uppish fellow to imagine any work of his worth half that sum. I don't deny that they are very good pictures, and most charming likenesses of dear Katherine; but I'll not give two hundred for what I can get for one by waiting; and I will wait, and you will see that he will be only too glad to take half-price!'

Katherine detested this spirit, so did Mr. Carey; but unfortunately it was only too probable that Mr. Hackblock's little stratagem would be crowned with success.

'I hope he will lose them!' exclaimed Katherine. 'It will serve him right if he does! Do buy them, papa—how cruel you are to say "no" to me!'

'I should offend Hackblock mortally! I have so often heard him say he means to have them. He counts on getting them, and he will, too; for Davenport has never yet had the luck to sell a big picture, except that one he sold to me; and that, you know, was a commission.'

'Never mind about Mr. Hackblock—buy them, father; you must.'

Mr. Carey shook his head, and said:

'Oh no, I always let Hackblock have his own way! I could not buy them after what he has said.'

'Why should you always let him have his own way? You are as good as he.'

'I? Oh no, not in the office!'

'Yes, you are.'

'He found all the money!'

'Let him go on finding it! You do twice as much work as he, and you have all the brains!'

'You know nothing whatever about it, my dear young woman!' said Mr. Carey, vainly struggling to conceal his delight at her words, and thinking, with intense satisfaction, that the girl was 'a regular

chip of the old block, and somehow or other always contrived to hit the right nail on the head.'

'You are going to the Academy with the Davenports, you say?' continued Mr. Carey, when he had recovered himself.

'I never said so—I said they had asked me.'

'Well, darling, that's the same thing, isn't it? You are going, I suppose?'

'No, I am not—not to-day.'

'Oh, do go! I'll meet you there; and then we will see what can be done about the pictures.'

'No, I think not. You can do all that is necessary without me. I am not going. Don't say any more about it. I don't seem to care about going there to-day.'

Katherine's likings were so studied by the family, that these words always acted as a spell—if she did not wish to go, she should not be asked.

'Then I'll go without you,' said he meekly. 'I'll go about two. If Hackblock is there, I'll advise him to settle the matter at once. Dear me, what are two hundred pounds to him? By-the-bye, you had better send a telegram to the Davenports to stop their coming. Just tell them not to call for you; I shall see them there, and will explain that your capricious little ladyship did not care to go out.'

Katherine sighed. She had made a great sacrifice to virtue, and it was spoken of as a thing of small account—a mere passing caprice. However, her father did not know—never must know. She went and sat with her mother; but, when eleven o'clock drew near, she retreated quietly—she wished to spare herself the pain of having to resist her mother's entreaties to go and take a walk in the park, backed by assurances that these walks did her more good than anything else; for she always came back looking twice as well as when she went out. She could make the sacrifice; but she did not feel equal to the effort of reiterating that she stayed in because she hated going out.

Seeing her leave the room about the usual time, Mrs. Carey supposed that the dear child had gone to dress for her walk. The 'dear child' had, however, crept into a desolate and uninhabited front bedroom, where, quaking lest a housemaid, whom she had just passed on the stairs on her way to lightly top-dress one of the rooms entrusted to her charge, should, for some reason or other, stray into this, and espy what her young mistress was doing, Katherine placed herself by the window, and looked through the folds of a muslin blind at the house opposite. There could surely be no great harm in trying to catch one little glimpse of the man with whom she might have spent so many happy hours that very day, if she had not sacrificed inclination to duty? She had given up her walk in the park; she had given up going to the Royal Academy, where she would have seen him, and all from a sense of duty. 'Duty' is

a high-sounding word, and Katherine liked to use it. She had no practical acquaintance with the meaning of the term, and mighty little occasion for the exercise of the virtue. What kept her away from the park and Mr. Barrington was much more a certain sense of shame, consequent on the laying bare his and her secret, than any sense of duty. How could it be duty, when she was even now looking forward to the time when she might safely assume that he had forgotten what had occurred on that momentous Friday morning, and meet him again on the safer and less familiar footing of an earlier period of their acquaintance?

A little before eleven, the door of the house opposite opened, and he came out. Once he glanced at No. 15, but not with the air of a man who expects to see a sight for which his eyes are longing. How should it be so?—never had he seen her at any window there. She shrank back, feeling that folded muslin was terribly insufficient to shroud a girl occupied as she was; but he gave no second look. How short was this pleasure which she had procured for herself! In another minute he was out of the street; and she was left there with the regret she had felt before increased twenty-fold by the sight of him on his way to meet her. Not to-day, not next day, nor for many days to come must she go there. How could she look in his face? How speak in a natural voice? She, who had let him perceive how his words and looks had affected her—she, who had learnt so much from them? She sat idly in the window. She knew he would wait for her till the very last moment; but, when one o'clock came, he would surely return.

At one he did return, looking crest-fallen and disappointed. She could see it in his walk; she could see it in his face. This time he scrutinized the exterior of No. 15 most narrowly. There was something in his appearance which cut Katherine to the heart. He looked sad and reproachful, and as if he felt he was being very hardly dealt with. He entered his house, and almost immediately afterwards she, from her high window, saw what she could not have seen had she been down below, saw him draw his chair to a place near the window from whence he, unobserved himself, could observe the Careys' front-door. 'Ah, he knows that he has nothing to expect from the garden-door; he is going to try what can be obtained from the front. He thinks, of course, that I am going to the Academy.'

Katherine was at length forced by fear of detection to abandon her watch, but shortly after two she stole back for one more look. He had just pushed back his chair in disgust at having passed such an unproductive hour, and was about to leave the house. She saw him leave it; saw him get into a hansom, and divined that he had come to the conclusion that Burlington House was the place to find her. She felt bitterly disappointed at the thought that she might have been there.

CHAPTER XVI.

'*Duchess.* Out upon pictures ! If they be so tedious,
Give me things with some life.'

MIDDLETON'S *Witches*.

'I yield to the necessity which translates itself into crown pieces for me.'—
BALZAC'S *Letters to his Sister*.

POETS and painters, ancient and modern, have not disdained to take for their theme the anguish of the lover who, parted from his mistress by fate, seeks her even inside the gates of hell. It is with no feeling of disrespect to the great Exhibition of our country, that I hint that Barrington's labours when he went to Burlington House on its opening day in the spring-time of the year, to try to obtain a sight of his Katherine, bore some faint resemblance to the heroic lover who sought his Eurydice. To say so is, of course, to compare small things with great ; and the difficulties which Barrington encountered were but petty and vexatious. Nevertheless, they were infinitely exasperating ; and, besides that, wholly without the compensation of constituting a claim to heroism. And yet, though the guardians of the door were less terrible than those who confronted Orpheus, they were just as inexorable. More so, indeed, for his skill in a sister art obtained Orpheus a free admission ; but no such plea would have obtained this favour for Barrington. Inside, too, the crowd was as dense as in Pluto's own domain, the heat almost as insupportable, the apparent hopelessness of the search as heart-rending. It was early in the afternoon when Barrington entered, but there was an almost impenetrable crowd in the vestibule ; and he knew that there were almost a dozen such rooms, with outlets into each other in due course, but also with subtle opportunities for the pursued person to turn, and re-turn, and double on his steps, so that no pursuer could follow. Even when two people are aware of each other's presence, and doing their very best to meet ; even when they have a large number of acquaintances in common, who can assist the search by saying where the missing person was last seen, the crowd is so great and the power of turning such information to account so impeded by it, that hours may pass in unavailing pursuit. Barrington and Katherine had few friends in common—hardly any. The Dalrymples were the only real ones, and Barrington rejoiced to think that they were now in another quarter of the globe. He began his search in a business-like way by looking in his catalogue to see where Davenport's pictures were hung. They were in the first and second rooms. He did not think that Katherine was one of the beauties who are usually to be seen on the opening days, hanging about the rooms in which their portraits are exhibited, dressed in the very garments in which they sat for them, wearing

even the very necklaces ; but he did think that he was more likely to hear something about her if he stayed there himself. He had frequently seen the pictures in Davenport's studio—it was well that he had, for he certainly could not have seen much of them now. Through an opening in the tightly compacted mass of people before him, he caught one delicious glimpse of the soft, warm colouring of Katherine's lovely face—one glimpse of her pliant figure as rendered by the artist. He did not want to see more—he detested the idea of sharing the pleasure of sight with all those would-be critics and self-elected connoisseurs. He heard one gentleman say, after consulting his catalogue : ‘ Miss Carey ; oh, the same girl who was making hay in that picture in the other room. Well, I advise her to make her hay while the sun shines ; these professional beauties have a very short reign of it ! ’

Barrington scowled at the speaker ; he could have knocked him down for applying that singularly insulting term to such a girl as Katherine. It drove him out of those two first rooms. He spent nearly an hour in pushing his way through the others ; all in vain was the suffering he underwent—she was nowhere to be found. He could not bring himself to look at pictures—they stared in his face whichever way he turned—he was in no humour to look at such things ; he was weary of the sight of brightly coloured canvases : he had not come to see them, but Katherine. Still he could not find her ; and all that he gained by that hard morning's work was two bits of knowledge, the result of his own observation. First, that whenever it comes to be a question of fighting your way step by step, women are much more deadly antagonists than men, being more free in the use of their shoulders and elbows and less regardful of existing rights of standing-room. Secondly, that, broadly speaking, the bad pictures in an exhibition give quite as much pleasure as the good ones.

Having made up his mind that both these propositions were sound, he returned to the first room as the shortest route home ; for he was sick of pictures and picture-lovers, and longed to get away from them. This time he saw Messrs. Hackblock and Carey standing near the doorway, engaged in earnest conversation. Truth compels me to add that he drew near them at once, in the hope of picking up some fragment of information about Katherine. He was a stranger to Mr. Hackblock, and had a great wish to remain so. Mr. Carey was too much absorbed by what he himself was saying to observe him.

‘ I am as much disappointed as you are,’ said he to his partner. ‘ You must know very well that I would have given any sum to make my own of those two pictures ! They are life-like ! Twice as good as the thing he did for me ! I should have bought both when I first saw them, only you seemed so determined to have them.’

‘ So I was. I was quite determined.’

'Then why not secure them when you had a chance? You have disappointed yourself and me too, for I have no hesitation in saying that I would have given Davenport his own price!'

'Keep cool, Carey, I beg of you,' replied Mr. Hackblock, in a quiet but irritating manner, which had the effect of making Mr. Carey twice as warm as before. 'Keep cool, my dear fellow. There you go, fretting and fuming, instead of trying to consider what we ought to do. I did quite right to hold back. It was not that I objected to the price—why should I? It's nothing to what I do give for pictures, and for some which do not possess half the interest for me that these do. It wasn't the cash, I assure you. It was just because that Davenport is such a conceited fool, that I did not care to make him more so. He would have gone about telling everybody that he had placed two pictures in my collection—that's what he would have done; and mind, I don't care a pin for his silly affected work! I only wanted these things because Katherine sat for them.'

'Of course——' began Mr. Carey sadly.

'Now don't pull a long face, Carey. I'll have them still. They are bought by Killigrew, the dealer. We can buy them of him, and Davenport need never know that we cared to have them. Let us see if we can find Killigrew; he is sure to be somewhere about.'

Barrington had, of course, only listened to the first few words said by these moneyed gentlemen; he had then seen that he was not at that moment likely to learn anything that he did want to know, and extremely likely to hear something not intended for his ears. After all, the Davenports were the people to find, for it was with them that Katherine had arranged to come. At last he found them. They, poor things, had been carefully avoiding the rooms in which the three pictures most interesting to them were hung. Nancy looked very happy, and happy she was, and lovely too, in her newly acquired lapis lazuli necklace. Before Barrington could approach Davenport, Mr. Killigrew, the dealer, rushed up fervently to him, and in honeyed words informed him that early that morning he had had the 'great good fortune to secure his two most beautiful and highly original pictures, and begged to congratulate him on them.' They were 'admirable! Full of rhythmic impulse, replete with tenderness of tone, and delicately adjusted values.' Davenport was dazzled by such glowing language, but still more so by the fact that Mr. Killigrew thought sufficiently well of him and of his art, to dive down into his treasury of fine language and bring forth these choice though perhaps rather unintelligible phrases—phrases with the first gloss of the newest fashion of high-art criticism still resplendent on them.

Davenport did not want that dealer to have those pictures, but he did want to stand so high in the world that that dealer, and all other dealers, should think it no waste of time to pay him court. Mr.

Killigrew continued: 'I assure you, my dear sir, that I am delighted with my purchases. Could I come and have a look at anything else you may happen to have in hand? Where is your studio?' and straightway he pulled out a note-book, and suavely hung on Davenport's words.

Nancy heard all that passed; she fingered her necklace, and felt that dear Frank had done well to buy it. Dear Frank always did right. After this he might go and buy fenders, and fire-irons, and coal-boxes of solid gold, if he liked; never again would she oppose him! Nay, more; she even felt capable of entering Zaccary's inner and innermost shop, and of making art-purchases herself. Barrington was standing by her. He shared in her joy as heartily as he could. He himself was miserable, for now he knew that Katherine had refused to come. Davenport's elation did not last long; a dreadful thought came to him; and, seeing that Mr. Killigrew was occupied in showing something to Nancy, he took the opportunity of whispering to Barrington his fear that there must be something terribly wrong about his pictures, or people would not buy them.

'What do you think?' he asked nervously.

'Whenever anyone applauded Phocion's speeches, he always asked what bad thing he had let slip, and he was an idiot for doing so; and you are an idiot too, for in the long-run the public is always right, and no true——'

Here Barrington was interrupted by the sight of Messrs. Hackblock and Carey rolling cumbrously towards them. They were both stout men, and awkward, because they only half liked the errand on which they were bent. Mr. Killigrew was the one whom they wanted. Mr. Hackblock came behind him and touched his arm significantly. Mr. Hackblock was a man dearly loved by dealers. He had so many houses, and each house was possessed of such ample wall-space, and Mr. Hackblock himself was possessed of such a raging and unextinguishable appetite for extremely bad and high-priced pictures, that Mr. Killigrew would have bounded eagerly after him to the uttermost parts of the earth. He did bound after him now. They retired a few steps out of the Davenports' hearing. Mr. Carey would have followed them, but Barrington seized on the opportunity of saying a few words to him.

'Miss Carey is not with you,' said he, though he still hoped to hear that she was.

'No, she is not with me. I particularly wanted her to come, but she seemed so unwilling, that I did not like to press her. It is rather crowded to-day, I don't deny it; but, after all, not much worse than it will be for many a long day to come. I wish I could have persuaded her.'

'So do I,' replied Barrington heartily.

'Yes, but she knows her own mind best. When she tells you she doesn't want to do a thing, it's no good for you to begin to tell her

that she does. She is not one of the undecided ones. I have made it a rule never to interfere with her. But I must go to my friend Mr. Hackblock; I know he wants me. Good-morning, Mr. Barrington. Look in on us when you're able.'

'Frank,' whispered Nancy, 'have you made that dealer promise to burn a sacrificial taper beneath your pictures?'

'No,' growled Frank; 'you see, there is no reason to suppose that he bought them for himself.'

Davenport's fine feelings were ruffled by the idea that any works of his had been bought merely as articles of commerce. He admitted that it was perhaps a good thing for him that they had been thus bought, but somehow or other he felt incompetent to deal with the facts of the world as they presented themselves to him.

'I dare say,' said he at length, 'that he has only bought them because he knew of some one who was anxious to have them. I can't, for the life of me, conceive why everyone doesn't buy pictures for himself.'

They went into the other rooms. Messrs. Hackblock and Carey remained in urgent conversation with Mr. Killigrew. All did not seem to be going well. Mr. Hackblock's face grew greyer and more dismal each moment. His heart was absolutely set on having these two portraits of the charming girl who was engaged to his son; and each word spoken by Mr. Killigrew went far towards convincing him that neither the one nor the other picture would ever hang on his walls.

'Sold already! That's almost incredible! You say yourself that you only bought them a short time ago!'

'I bought them at twelve o'clock. Yes, it was at twelve, as near as I can recollect; and I sold them both about twenty minutes afterwards.'

'And you had no idea that these other gentlemen wanted them?' asked Mr. Carey, who was rather innocent as regarded transactions of this kind.

Mr. Killigrew shrugged his shoulders, and said:

'They are attractive pictures, sir. People like something of that kind, hanging opposite to them at their breakfast or dinner. I don't know how it is, but people seem to me to buy pictures just for the pleasure they give them, without any regard to whether they are getting a good thing or not. I confess I bought those pictures entirely for myself. I am a sincere lover of art; and it's a constant grief to me that I never can keep a picture I like. I'd rather by far not have sold those two gems.'

Hereupon the dealer heaved a heavy sigh.

'You say that people like pictures of that kind hanging opposite to them at breakfast and dinner!' exclaimed Mr. Carey, on whom these words had produced a highly irritating effect; 'but I tell you that they are likenesses of my only daughter, and very good

likenesses, and I wished to purchase them myself. It's not at all pleasant to me to think that any portrait of her is to hang opposite to anyone, either at his breakfast or his dinner—they ought not to hang opposite to anyone but me, or my friend here.'

'Be calm, my dear Carey; I am sure Mr. Killigrew is quite ready to listen to reason. At the same time, Killigrew,' continued Mr. Hackblock, suddenly becoming angry himself, 'I can't conceive how you could do such a thing as sell those pictures without giving me the first offer; you must have known that I was sure to want them!'

Mr. Killigrew shrugged his shoulders; and, forgetting the rôle of the enthusiastic patron of art for art's sake, which he had so lately assumed, he exclaimed:

'How could I refuse a good offer for such an uncertainty? They might both have been thrown on my hands! My dear sir, I will do my very best to replace your loss. Give me a commission, and I will get Davenport to paint two pictures quite as good as these.'

'No, no!' cried Mr. Hackblock; 'I'll have these! I must have them. You, Mr. Killigrew, will be so kind as to go to the gentlemen who have anticipated me, and represent the matter to them. Say that the young lady's father, and her future father-in-law, have somehow or other let the matter escape their attention until too late—that they are extremely disappointed, and beg these gentlemen to relinquish their respective purchases.'

'Gentlemen! Respective purchases! They are both the property of the same gentleman!'

'But who is he?' cried Mr. Carey.

'A client of mine,' replied Mr. Killigrew consequentially; 'a very good client. I almost believe he would have bought that other picture of Miss Carey, only it was not to be had.'

'But,' interposed Mr. Hackblock, in a voice of extreme respect, 'this client of yours must have a great deal of money!'

'That he has! Money without end! Money and land, too; and a pedigree as long as my arm! He is quite a young fellow—under thirty. He was at Cambridge, I think, when his father or his uncle died, and he came into the property. It's only five or six years ago; but I can see that he is going to be a first-rate buyer—first-rate; and he knows what's good, too!' and the dealer rubbed his hands with gleeful enthusiasm.

'We are wasting precious time!' said Mr. Hackblock. 'Mr. Killigrew, will you kindly go to Mr. — What is his name, by-the-bye—not a secret, I suppose?'

'His name is Carew. Stop, I have his card somewhere!' and presently Mr. Killigrew produced a card, on which was to be read the name of 'Mr. Coventry Wilbraham Carew;' and 'Ellerbeck Hall, Northumberland,' in one corner, and 'Reform Club,' in the other.

'Oh!' growled Mr. Hackblock. 'Well, Mr. Killigrew, I won't detain you longer. Will you kindly go to this Mr. Carew, and state the case? Say that I shall be very sorry to deprive him of the pictures; but that I am quite sure that, under the circumstances, he will not wish to withhold them from me.'

Mr. Killigrew departed; and Mr. Carey, not averse to pointing a moral, remarked:

'You won't get them for two hundred guineas now.'

'The dealer's commission, you mean? It's of no consequence! I am glad to have them, whatever they cost me.'

'You think you are sure to get them?'

'Quite! Killigrew is a good little fellow. He will do anything to oblige me.'

But when the said Killigrew returned, the answer that he brought was, that Mr. Carew was extremely sorry to be so disobliging, but that he could not bring himself to part with either.

'I have done all I possibly could,' said Killigrew; 'and I assure you I was most anxious to persuade him, but it's a fact that I couldn't.'

The elderly gentlemen looked blank; then they ventured to suggest that the dealer should try again.

The dealer shook his head, and said he felt unable to re-open the question.

'Besides, it's of no use,' he added. 'Mr. Carew seems as firm as a rock about it—quite civil, but quite firm. I am bound to say that he seems to me to be a very strong-willed sort of gentleman.'

'Young?' inquired Mr. Hackblock.

'Yes, quite young, and very good-looking.'

'Confound him!'

'Well, yes, confound him! but if you will excuse my making such a suggestion, gentlemen, he seems to me to have taken quite a violent fancy for the young lady whose portrait he has bought. I am certain he has.'

'How ridiculous!' said Mr. Carey.

'Impossible!' growled Mr. Hackblock.

Meanwhile, in another part of the building, Davenport and Nancy were just being introduced to a tall, well-built, but slight young man, with rather light but immensely thick brown hair, grey eyes, and pale but very handsome face. His manner was an odd mixture of shyness and fearlessness, and his name was Carew. He expressed his hearty admiration of Davenport's work—he invited Davenport and his wife to come down to the North and pay him a long visit, and see some other pictures which he had, and then he said, almost timidly: 'I suppose you think that I have behaved very shabbily in not letting Mr. Hackblock have these two of yours?'

‘Mr. Hackblock?’ said Davenport in much surprise, for he had not heard the story.

Mr. Carew related it, and Davenport at once exclaimed: ‘You have done perfectly right! I should have hated to think that I had been working so hard to give pleasure to that man! I am so glad you sent him about his business!’

‘Is Miss Carey as charming in reality as you have made her?’

‘She’s a thousand times more so!’

‘And you know her?’

‘Yes, very well.’

‘She sometimes comes to your house?’ and having said that, Mr. Carew looked as if he wanted to say a very great deal more.

‘You would like to see her to compare her with your pictures?’ said Nancy sympathetically.

‘I don’t know about comparing her with the pictures,’ said he more boldly; ‘I’d very much like to see her.’

‘I am afraid all the Careys will be cross with you—it might be difficult to get her to meet you,’ said Nancy, who had been considering ways and means.

‘I am afraid so!’ said he sadly, as if overborne by his sin. ‘I am sorry, but I couldn’t possibly have done otherwise.’

‘Of course not!’ said Davenport; ‘and you ought to see Miss Carey. My wife and I will make a point of asking her to our house some day soon, and you shall meet her. She need not be told that you are to be there.’

‘Frank! Frank!’ murmured Nancy, when Mr. Carew was gone, ‘you have done a foolish thing! You talked of making the buyer of your pictures burn perpetual tapers before them in token of worship of Katherine and her beauty; here is a man who needs no making—he has lighted the tapers of his own accord already, and you ought not to encourage him in such nonsense—you ought to blow them out!’

CHAPTER XVII.

‘I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me.’—ECCLESIASTES.

THE longer Katherine stayed away from the park, the more difficult it became to go. She had begun to think that it was very foolish to stay away, that she was most certainly exaggerating the importance of what had taken place when last she had seen Mr. Barrington, but still she felt ashamed to see him again.

‘Why, Katherine, you never seem to go into the park now,’ said Mrs. Carey, in some concern. ‘It must be more than a fortnight since you had a walk.’

‘Oh no, I have taken to going out in the carriage instead. You

see, it goes to take Nancy Davenport a drive, so I may as well drive too, and have the pleasure of her company.'

'Driving is not walking. I wish you would walk.'

'We do walk. I have not been out for the last two days because I have a sore throat, but we drove to Richmond Park the other day, and walked for more than an hour. Didn't we, Cosette, my beauty? It's far nicer there than here; isn't it?'

'I dare say it is,' said Mrs. Carey, and so the matter dropped.

'Mr. Lewis Barrington is in the drawing-room, ma'am,' said the maid, suddenly appearing.

'Ask him to come here, Clarke; or perhaps, Kitty, it would be more civil if you were to go and bring him.'

Katherine had upset her work-box, and was half-way under the sofa in search of its contents. With difficulty she found words to say: 'Let Clarke go. I want to pick up these things.' Clarke went. Katherine did pick up her things, and recovered her usual colour before he came. His first glance was at her. She was standing by the window, nerving herself to meet him. By the time that he had said a few words to Mrs. Carey, Katherine was able to greet him with composure. Nothing whatever was to be gathered from her manner except that she did not wish to quarrel with him. He had brought Mrs. Carey some very pretty wild-flowers.

'You have every hot-house flower that blows,' said he, glancing round the room and seeing flowers in every place where flowers could add a grace, 'but I went into the country to gather you a fresh bouquet of these wild creatures.'

'Oh, what a number of miles you must have had to go to find them! You have used hours of your precious time!'

'Oh no, I only used a fragment of time which I generally devote to pleasure.'

'You gave up your pleasure to do this for me!'

'This was a pleasure, and a great one; besides, I did not give up my pleasure—it was taken from me.'

Katherine knew what he meant. She felt that he was probably looking at her. She dared not return his gaze, and did her best to go on quietly with her work.

'No flowers are half so delightful as wild ones,' continued Mrs. Carey; 'you can't imagine what a treat it is to me to have these!'

Barrington smiled happily. It was his first happy smile since he had entered the room. She had made him feel that he had done something approaching to a good action. He again glanced in Katherine's direction. He wished she would look up, but she was not yet sufficiently mistress of herself to do so, and though she had a bad sore throat, she still continued to sit by the window, far away from him, with her eyes glued to her work as if she had not enough light. Why would she not meet his eye? Was there no way of making her do so?

'Are you very busy writing, Mr. Barrington?' asked Mrs. Carey. 'We never see you, do we, Katherine?'

Katherine did not know what to say, and ended by making no answer. Barrington was equally silent. Mrs. Carey's words made him feel that he was playing the sorry part of a traitor. She continued, 'I suppose you are always busy with articles and things of that kind, but are you writing any books?'

'No; I am only writing a play.'

Katherine started. Was he going to reveal her carefully kept secret? It had been kept so devoutly; was he now about to punish her by revealing it?

'Oh, a play! A new play!' exclaimed Mrs. Carey. 'Do tell me about it. I am so interested in everything connected with the stage!'

'Then that is where Miss Katherine derives her wish to be an actress,' thought Barrington. 'It's from her mother.'—'I'll tell you,' said he, for besides being most anxious to hear Katherine's opinion of a certain scene, he was also desirous to stimulate her to a display of feeling of some kind. 'It occurred to me some time ago that Meinhold's "Amber Witch" would make an excellent play. The interest is rather remote, perhaps, but the story is so dramatic, and the situations are so good.'

'He has told my secret!' thought Katherine angrily. 'He has actually told my mother all about my play!' Her face flushed with surprise and anger, and she looked at Barrington with eyes sparkling with the same feelings. He was sitting exactly in front of Mrs. Carey's sofa. Katherine was behind it, and could throw what expression she liked into her face, but he was so placed that every look in his could be seen by Mrs. Carey. He met Katherine's eyes; his did their best to say, 'Trust me,' but they were compelled to say it in so quiet and unassuming a way that he was afraid that they would not persuade Katherine to show much patience.

'I was asked to do this by a friend,' he continued, still looking as appealingly as he dared at Katherine, 'a friend for whom it was a delightful privilege to work; and from time to time I had the benefit of her opinion about bringing this or that portion of the story more prominently forward. This was of great importance to me, because she was to play the part of the heroine, and it had, of course, to be adapted as much as possible to her taste.'

'Of course you would have to see her,' said Mrs. Carey. 'That understands itself.'

'Yes, but unfortunately I have been deprived of the chance of referring to her for help whenever I was in doubt myself, and now I am quite at a standstill.' As he said this he looked to see how Katherine took the announcement. She assumed an air of absolute unconcern, and evidently did her utmost to convey to him that whether he made progress or not was a matter of extraordinary indifference to her.

Mrs. Carey, on the contrary, looked sympathetic, and said, with much pity, 'But in that case you can't tell whether you are writing what will please her or not.'

He shook his head and said, 'Precisely! It is most difficult for me! I can't get on at all. You see, I could easily finish it to please myself, but suppose it didn't please her? There is one point especially about which I am in doubt—I really don't know what to do. Perhaps you, Mrs. Carey, will give me two or three hints; or if you don't feel equal to that, perhaps Miss Carey would?'

Unperceived by her mother, Katherine shook her head, though without taking the trouble to look up to see if Barrington saw her ungracious refusal. She intended it to be ungracious. She was angry with him for telling so much—for telling anything. To her mind, the whole bloom of the thing was gone as soon as it ceased to be a well-kept secret and tender link of union between him and her. Let her dear mother give every assistance which in her lay, she herself would never again bestow one thought on the creation of a work which was either hers altogether, and hers alone, or else a thing in which she took no interest whatsoever. How could he be so utterly heartless as to betray their treasured secret—the secret which had brought them together—to a third person, even if that third person was her own dear mother? Katherine screwed her lips together, and sat looking more fixedly at her needle than ever. It was the first time that she had been angry with Barrington, but now she was more than angry with him—she was bitterly offended.

Mrs. Carey was saying, 'I am sure, dear Mr. Barrington, if my poor opinion would be of any value to you, you are most welcome to have it; but if you are writing this part for a particular person to play, and she has strong likings and dislikings, I should be so afraid of misleading you; it would be such a pity if I did that. Don't think that I am not anxious to help you. I am sure both my daughter and I would be only too glad to do that, but no one can do you any real good but the lady herself. Don't you think so, too, Katherine?'

'I suppose not,' said Katherine coldly.

'And you can't see her, you say?' continued Mrs. Carey. 'Couldn't you write to her?'

Before answering Mrs. Carey, Barrington looked inquiringly at Katherine. At last something definite had been said. Could he write to her? Katherine shook her head. She was inflexibly determined to have nothing more to do with this.

'I am afraid I can't,' he replied.

'Then let us do our best to help you. Ask my daughter, Mr. Barrington; ask her about anything which you are in doubt of. I will throw in a word now and then if anything occurs to me: but I am too old to put myself in the place of young people; my daughter

will give you twice as much help as I can. She is still young and sympathizing.'

The word 'sympathizing' did not seem to describe Katherine very appropriately at present. Barrington found her eminently unsympathizing, and Mrs. Carey would probably have done so too had she been able to see her. Barrington felt obliged to drive her to say something—if she would but speak, he would know better what to do—at present he was in despair of being able to conciliate her. He therefore said :

'Thank you ; then, with Mrs. Carey's permission, I will briefly state the point which is a difficulty to me. I am in the beginning of the fifth act, Miss Carey, and I want to know if you think that a young lady would like the part better, if I arranged to make the heroine do what perhaps is——'

Hereupon Katherine rose, and said rather nervously :

'Excuse my interrupting you, Mr. Barrington. I will do my very best to be of service to you ; but I am afraid I can't do much, for one reason, because I am very stupid, and for another, because I can't imagine myself acting that play.'

'Can't you ?' said he ; 'can't you, really ? I wish you would tell me why not ?' for this was such a sudden change, and it overwhelmed him.

'Only for silly reasons. Still, silly reasons, if you act on them, are just as important as wise ones. I fancy if ever I wish to take a part in any play, it will be in one which has been written for me myself, and kept secret from everyone but me until it is seen on the stage. I could not act in one that had been discussed with all kinds of people—I should hate it.'

'But the actors must know about it, Kitty,' said Mrs. Carey soothingly.

'And the author can scarcely be kept in the dark,' said Barrington ; and bitterly angry Katherine felt with him for being able to jest.

'Come, Kitty, be sensible, dear, and help Mr. Barrington. He only wants a hint or two on some trifling point, I am sure.'

'That is all,' said he ; 'and I am very sorry that I am compelled to be so troublesome.'

'You are not troublesome at all !' said Mrs. Carey warmly ; she saw that he looked distressed, and that his face had clouded over, and wondered why Katherine was so disobliging.

Miss Carey made no such protest.

'Yes, I am,' he replied bitterly, for he noticed this omission ; 'but, unfortunately, I undertook to write this, and I am so afraid of not getting it finished before I go abroad.'

'Abroad !' Katherine felt chilled in a moment. 'Abroad !' but probably he only meant France or Italy. Let him go to France or Italy ; it would be better. It would give both of them time to

forget much that was better forgotten. When he came home again, she would be able to meet him as a friend.

‘You are going abroad?’ inquired Mrs. Carey.

‘Yes; my friends the Dalrymples—they are your friends, too—want me to go to them; they have found an eligible post for me.’

Katherine dropped her needlework in alarm; for the Dalrymples were at Melbourne. Mr. Dalrymple had received an official appointment there, and was not likely to return for ten or twelve years.

‘But surely, if you go out there, it will be a great injury to your literary work?’ said Mrs. Carey.

‘In some respects it will; but I think that, on the whole, I shall probably be able to do more there than here. Mr. Dalrymple offers me a very good appointment. I really think it will be a good thing for me to go.’

Katherine observed that he said ‘will be,’ and not ‘would be’; then it was settled that he was to go. She picked up her work again, and applied herself to it: she was only too glad to have any pretext for looking down.

‘Then you really are going?’ said Mrs. Carey reproachfully: even she felt that she should miss Barrington when he left this hemisphere.

‘Yes, I shall go. The Dalrymples want me; they urge me to go. After all, what is there to prevent me?—I have no ties here!’

Was he uttering a bitter lamentation, or was he heartlessly telling her that she was nothing to him? His words were susceptible of either interpretation. Katherine dared not try to understand them better by means of a close study of his face. Her heart began to feel as cold and as heavy as lead. Was she driving him away, or did he want to go? In any case he was going; for, when Mrs. Carey again said, ‘You really think you will leave this country?’ his answer was ‘Yes; I am resolved to go.’

At that moment, he was indeed resolved to go. As he had just said, ‘What was there to keep him?’ Katherine was in the same room with him; but in what way was he the happier for her presence? She was cold as a stone. What was her beauty to him, when it was all given over to looking rigid and pitiless? He would rather by far be thousands of miles away, and know that their meeting was an impossibility, than live as he did now within a stone’s throw, fretting his very soul away by incessant calculations as to the chances of her relenting. Morning after morning he had gone out tormented by doubt of seeing her; day after day he had returned heartsick and faint with disappointment. He had rather by far be banished altogether from England, and all that England could give him, than stay there to be continually brought face to face with a banishment which was yet more terrible to him. He would go. He well knew why the Dalrymples had found this ex-

cellent appointment for him. After meeting Katherine in the Davenport's house in October last, he had gone to Mrs. Dalrymple, and had told her that he had come to inform her that he could no longer be bound to avoid Miss Carey so strictly—that he was constantly compelled either to be offensively rude to her, or to break his word, and that he must therefore retract his promise. The Dalrymples were then preparing to go to Melbourne. Mr. Dalrymple had just received his appointment, and was obliged to start almost immediately.

Mrs. Dalrymple had listened with regret, but could do nothing more. If Barrington was resolved not to be bound down to forswear Katherine's society, he was free to decline; but she had then said, 'Lewis, if my husband were to find that he wanted another secretary, what do you say to coming out for a while?' and Barrington had thought it politic to show no special aversion to such a post and such a separation. At that time, he had thought it impossible that, under any circumstances, a day could come when he would wish to go. That day had come; he was going. He sat silent for a few minutes, thinking of these things, and how soon the memory of this room, and of those whom he now saw in it, would be 'portions and parcels of the dreadful past!'

Mrs. Carey was silent also; she was thinking that, probably long before he reached those distant shores of the under-world, she, too, would have entered a new and strange country—one from which, God help us! no one dear to us ever returns.

Katherine could scarcely think at all. She was going to lose him, and felt stunned. The intensity of her regret only made her look colder and more stony. She dared not speak, lest her voice should sound strange and broken. She could not raise her heavy eyelids—she felt in a miserable dream. And yet she knew that it was no dream—that he really was going. Mrs. Carey recovered first, and said:

'One hates the thought of any change, Mr. Barrington, and Melbourne seems so far—so terribly far away from us; but you are young and strong, and I suppose that in your profession it is an immense gain to see these distant colonies. If you stay out there for a few years, you will be quite an authority on Australian affairs ever after. We must look on the bright side.'

Katherine heard the words 'the bright side.' How could there be one? God forbid that he thought that there was one, or that he was going away with any hope of happiness in his mind! She painfully raised her eyes to his face. It was gloomy enough to please her.

'I'll see you again before I go,' said he to Mrs. Carey, as he rose to take leave.

Katherine's heart stood still. Had it come to that?

'Katherine, dear,' said Mrs. Carey, 'will you guide Mr. Barrington—'

ton through the labyrinth which divides me from the rest of the world? Ring the bell as you pass, my child, and then Dilston will meet you on the stairs.'

Barrington wished she would not ring the bell. He did not want Dilston to meet them on the stairs. He wanted to have time to win his pardon. Katherine rose drearily and coldly. She rang the bell for Dilston, and opened the door which led into the long gallery which connected Mrs. Carey's room with the house. They entered it together, walking side by side. She seemed so very unforgiving that at last he began to feel almost angry with her, but suddenly he became aware that her eyes were full of tears.

'You know why I am going?' said he. 'It's because I feel you would like it.'

'I like it?' said she, half turning her pale face to him, but only half turning it.

'Yes, I have offended you somehow; you are changed to me.'

'I am not sufficiently changed to you to make it necessary for you to go to the other end of the world,' said Katherine, speaking with some difficulty. 'If you do that, we shall never see each other again.'

'We never do see each other as it is,' said he. 'Why will you not let me have that pleasure?'

She was silent for a moment; then she said impetuously:

'Why did you do what you must have known I could never forgive? The play was to be a secret between us. Why did you begin talking about it?'

'I have told nothing but the fact that I am writing it; it was your fault. I was compelled to learn your wishes on that one point, and couldn't see you. You were angry with me before I told that; you have avoided me for nearly a fortnight.'

She looked full of distress and painfully nervous, but made no attempt to answer this. They had now reached the door which opened on the stairs. Behind that door Barrington felt that Dilston was waiting for them. There was but one moment to win her over.

'You won't even look at me!' said he. 'You have not once let me see your eyes!'

She tried to look up, but could not do it. Suddenly she took hold of the handle of the door, and exclaimed:

'It is no use talking of all this! You are going away, and that puts an end to the play and to everything!'

He put his hand on hers and held it for a moment, as if to prevent her opening the door. She made no resistance, but stood faltering by his side.

'You do not imagine that I am going away because I wish to go? It's because I can't bear to live so near and never see you! I'd

rather by far be thousands of miles away, and know that the thing is an impossibility !

‘Then you *are* going ?’ said she, almost carelessly.

She was curiously provoking, and did not give him one fragment of help towards speaking his mind by showing hers.

‘Yes, I am going,’ he replied firmly ; ‘that is, unless you will let me see you sometimes.’

His hand was still restraining hers ; he felt hers fluttering about uneasily beneath his, as if to escape, but he held it tight, and said :

‘Answer—am I to go, or not ?’

‘You are not,’ she replied.

‘You will let me see you ?’

‘I will see you sometimes, as I used to do,’ said she at last. ‘Will that do ?’

‘That will do,’ said he, and released her hand. ‘If you promise that, I stay ; but having once tasted the delight of seeing you, I can’t live without it.’

‘We shall both of us have to live without it soon,’ said Katherine, for she knew that Roger Hackblock was coming home.

Some one was trying to turn the handle of the door on the other side. She was again holding it, and felt it move.

‘We must go,’ said she. ‘Dilston is waiting outside. You know I rang for him.’

‘Say you will come to-morrow, will you ?’

‘Yes,’ said she, ‘I will.’

He felt that it was madness, but as she said this he stooped down and kissed the hand with which she was just beginning to open the door. He did it so quickly and unexpectedly, and the consciousness that Dilston was on the other side of the barrier was so strong, that she could show no feeling of anger, surprise, or anything. She simply continued the action of opening the door, and almost instantly after the kiss had been given, the stalwart form of the footman was revealed. Katherine’s face was so pale that a deep blush only restored its natural colour. Barrington did not like to leave her until her eyes met his.

‘Good-bye till to-morrow, Miss Carey,’ said he.

On this she looked up, and all his unhappiness was over.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'Palamon. You love her, then?

Arcite. Who would not?

Pal. I saw her first.

Arc. That's nothing.

Pal. But it shall be.

Arc. I saw her too.

Pal. Yes, but you must not love.'

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MRS. CAREY, like many other invalids, required an unusually large amount of fresh air, and, in fact, never felt comfortable unless in a thorough draught. Frequently Katherine suffered for it, and on this occasion, having a sore throat already, she made it so much worse that when night came she was seriously ill, and besides being a victim to almost every evil which can befall a throat, was threatened with inflammation of the lungs into the bargain. She passed a dismal night, and next day, at the very time she had promised to meet Lewis Barrington, her aching head was lying wearily on her pillow, and that hand which had so recently thrilled beneath his kiss was now in the grasp of a medical gentleman, whose accents were bland, but whose mandates were stern. It is needless to say that he would not hear of her leaving her bed. The sun was shining, the birds flitting about, green trees were spreading wide branches to shelter her, but in bed Katherine had to lie. So said the family doctor; and when he saw her hand steal to her eyes to wipe away a tear of disappointment, he did but impress on her still more forcibly the necessity for obedience. Strongly as he had spoken, the old nurse followed him out of the room, to whisper: 'Sir, if you really mean that it is not safe for her to get up, you must be so good as to say more than that to her, for Miss Katherine is that wilful, there's no knowing what she'll do. I have known her bounce out of bed almost before your back was well turned, and go straight out of doors for a long walk, though you perhaps had just been telling her that it was as much as her life was worth to do such a thing!'

On this the doctor returned to her room, and said: 'Your illness, Miss Carey, will be comparatively trifling if you will allow me to manage you as I wish; if you are self-willed, you may be dangerously ill, and laid up for months.'

'If I obey, how long shall I have to stay in bed?'

'Ten days, or a fortnight at the most.'

'Then I will obey; in fact, I must. How could I get up when I am in such dreadful pain?'

The doctor bowed and left. She lay thinking of what she had missed. Suddenly she remembered that Barrington might perhaps think that she was keeping away from caprice or unkindness, be

bitterly offended, and at once decide to go thousands of miles away from her. At this thought her eyes filled with scalding tears.

'I want a pencil, nurse,' said she ; 'don't begin to say that it is bad for me to sit up and write, for I insist on having what I want. Be quick ; I only want to write a word or two. I can't be kept doing nothing.'

'Surely you have plenty to do, Miss Katherine, with bearing all that pain ! Isn't that hard enough work for you to do, and——'

'Give me a pencil and some paper,' interrupted Katherine impatiently. And she thus wrote to Barrington : 'I am ill in bed with a really bad sore throat, and can't go out. Perhaps it won't be well for a fortnight. That's why I do not keep my promise. Do not be angry with me. Write me a nice letter, and say that you are not.' She put this in an envelope, and wrote the address in pencil.

'Pencil !' muttered the nurse contemptuously. 'The post won't have anything to say to a letter not written in ink !'

'It's not a letter ; it's only a poor stupid note. Tell Dilston or some of them to take it at once. He will only have to walk across the street with it.'

That done, she was happy. Very soon came an answer : 'Angry with you ? Never ! I am only too grateful to you for thinking of me in your pain, and writing that note. Without it I should have been wretched ! I shall be anxious until I know that you are well. My thoughts are all yours. Send me a few words to-morrow if you are able ; but not for worlds would I have you run any risk.'

Katherine wrote a few words every day, and sometimes a few pages, leaving the nurse to draw what inferences she liked. Barrington sent his answers by post. They daily grew tenderer and longer. Katherine read them a hundred times, and lay on her bed of pain feeling herself the happiest girl alive.

The doctor came every day for more than a week, and sometimes twice, admitted the improvement which took place in her, but steadily forbade her to quit her bed for another week. Katherine was quite aware that she had been seriously ill, and that caution was still necessary ; but after being in bed seven or eight days, did not see why she was to stay seven more, when all violent pain had left her, and she had such a great desire to go out. She did not believe it would hurt her to go out ; besides, even if it were rather dangerous, she was willing to take the risk for the sake of what it brought her. So that very afternoon she wrote to Barrington : 'Expect to see me at our usual place to-morrow at eleven, or as soon after as I can get ready ; for I must not begin to dress until the doctor's visit is over, as he forbids me to leave my room. Don't write back to say that I had better not come, for I am well now ; besides, you yourself will see me, and can judge how I am bearing

the open air, and I promise to go home if you tell me I ought. I will obey *you*.'

By a quarter to eleven, she had seen her doctor—had again received the strictest orders not to venture even to sit up for an hour or two in her own room—had swiftly dressed herself, and gone downstairs; by twenty minutes past, she had opened the green garden-door, and by twenty-two, she had met Barrington, who could hardly restrain his joy at seeing her.

'How delightful it is to be out!' said she. 'That doctor wanted to keep me in the house for another week! I have made nurse promise not to let mother know I have left my room. I will go to her myself when I return, and then she will see how wise I was to come out.'

'Are you sure you are not doing what is very imprudent?' said he, for he was afraid she was not to be trusted.

'You know you can send me in if you see me looking tired. I said I would go. But it is warm—it can't hurt me.'

'Ah! I am to pass a self-denying ordinance! You look well and beautiful. It is such happiness to see you again!'

Katherine hung her head. She felt very timid. She liked to be quietly happy with him—not to be startled by unwonted compliments or avowals. She was not strong yet, and enjoyed the sense of being in the company of one dear to her, but wanted nothing more.

He saw that she had not yet shaken off her illness, and resolved to do and say nothing likely to distress her. She should rest quietly on the consciousness of his protecting affection. There was quite enough to make him happy without anything more. They walked up and down the well-known paths for nearly an hour, almost in silence. Neither of them had the least idea how few were the words that they exchanged during the time. To them each moment was an eventful one, crowded with delights, full of fresh reasons for being happy. Once Katherine lifted her sweet thoughtful eyes to his, and said:

'You did not really mean what you said last time I saw you? You never seriously thought of going to the Dalrymples?'

'I meant it when I said it, but if you say that you would like me to stay here, I stay.'

She smiled quietly, and said simply, 'Is there the least need for me to assure you of that?'

That speech, of course, brought on a long fit of silence—most speeches did. He and she did not look like lovers as they paced backwards and forwards in this preoccupied way. At least, none but practised observers would have recognised them as such. Their manner was so earnest; they looked so much on the ground at their feet, and so little at each other. When their eyes did meet, it was in such a troubled way, as if each knew that they were treading a

narrow and dangerous path, and that though all was as happy now as happy love could make it, one pressure of the hand, one look in each other's eyes the least bit longer than usual, would change everything into danger and difficulty. They seemed even afraid to speak to each other, and profoundly conscious that some force which might overmaster them if let loose was pressing nearer and nearer to them, and only kept back by a barrier so thin that a look or a touch would rend it asunder. Never before this day had so many things been said which seemed to bring the dangerous moment near.

'Where are you going in the summer?' asked Barrington; for it was July, and he was beginning to be afraid of losing sight of her.

'I don't know yet. To some place near London, where mother can be moved easily—not to Hazeldene. She doesn't like it; besides, the Hackblocks are not to be there this year.'

How this hateful name of Hackblock did protrude itself into their conversation at every turn! Surely the time must be drawing near for getting rid of it for ever. He humbly hoped that he had won Katherine's heart; if she had not been so ill, and if the remembrance of that other day had not been there to deter him, he would at once have put his fortune to the test, for the last ten days had brought them infinitely nearer to each other.

'Some place near you, you say. I wonder where I shall go?'

'To us for a while,' replied Katherine kindly. 'This time when we ask you, you will come, won't you?'

Before he could answer, he saw something—something eminently unwelcome. Roger Hackblock was advancing to meet them, looking doggedly determined to assert his ownership of Katherine without delay, and possibly not to do it quite pleasantly. He was coming quickly from Princess Margaret Street; they were walking very slowly towards it. Barrington did not lose an instant in preparing Katherine to meet him. She started when she saw who was coming, and exclaimed, 'Let us turn back! How cross he looks! He has no right to follow me in this way!'

'No, we must meet him. Miss Carey, do not show any irritation. Let this meeting of ours be considered a mere matter of accident. No one has any right to prevent us seeing each other; do not let anyone do it.'

'Certainly not; I won't allow it.'

'Be firm, then, and that will give us more time to think,' said he hurriedly, for Roger was near, and very soon it would be too late.

'Thank you,' said she, for she felt Barrington was wise—her own impulse would have been to show her anger.

'Remember, I can't live without you!' said he, at the very last instant when such words could be safe.

There was a bright pink flush in Katherine's face, and her eyes

were unfaltering as she looked at Roger Hackblock. She defied danger, and did not shrink from the unpleasant encounter. The feeling which was uppermost in her mind was that he had done something extremely shabby in breaking in on their meeting, and ought to be made to feel it. He took off his hat, and then held out his hand to Katherine stiffly, glared at Barrington, and finally said, in a voice full of suppressed discomposure :

‘I have just come from Hamburg. The steamer only got in at ten o’clock. I came a few days before my time on account of your illness, and went at once to your house. I did not expect to find you out of doors ! Who could have expected such a thing ? It is most imprudent ! Fancy being in bed a whole week with bronchitis and inflammation of the lungs, and then coming out against the doctor’s positive orders, and in the rain, too !’

‘In the rain !’ echoed Katherine.

The words seemed foolish to Barrington also, but a second’s observation convinced both that a fine rain, which possessed considerable wetting power, really was falling fast. The ground was shining with moisture—they had been too much absorbed by other things to notice it.

‘Yes, in the rain ! Katherine, you ought not to have done this. Suppose you take cold——’

‘I am not at all likely to do so. You talk of inflammation of the lungs, but I’ve not had that——’

‘Come,’ said he, offering his arm, ‘let me take you home at once.’ And he turned to Barrington with an air admirably adapted to convey to him that the proper thing for him to do was to take his departure at once.

Katherine saw it, but did not wish to lose the protection of his presence. ‘I’ll come,’ said she, ‘but we are all walking the same way. You know Mr. Barrington, Roger ; you were introduced to him at our party.’

The two men bowed—bowed scantily and defiantly ; then Barrington held out his hand to Katherine, and said, ‘I must leave you now. When I see you again, I hope to hear that your walk has done you no harm.’ There was a world of support in the firm grasp of his hand.

As soon as Barrington was gone, Roger Hackblock, who had scarcely been able to control his impatience, said, ‘Now, Katherine, I suppose you will tell me what this means ? I came home full of pleasure at the thought of seeing you again, and when I do see you, it is with this man. How do you happen to be walking with him ?’

‘Because he happened to meet me,’ she replied curtly.

‘Does he often happen to meet you, then ?’

‘No, not often ; sometimes.’

‘And when you do meet him, may I ask if you always walk with him ?’

‘Yes. I’ll tell you, Roger—I’ll tell you all I do, when we get in. Don’t say any more about it now. You look so angry, and speak so loud, that you make everyone stare at us ! Please wait until we get into the house. I have no desire to hide anything from you.’

He did wait, but he waited very sulkily, walking by her side in total silence, and with eyes bent sternly on some imaginary object in front of him.

Katherine would have gone in by the garden-door as usual, but he took the lead, and went as a matter of course to the front entrance, not being a personage made to use by-paths. He rang the bell noisily and angrily, and stood grinding his heels on the steps till the door was opened, strode in before Katherine, and at once made for the dining-room, that being the nearest room, and therefore the fittest for his purpose.

‘Here,’ said he ; ‘let us go in here, Katherine ; I must speak to you at once.’

The servant saw that something was terribly amiss, and prudently disappeared.

‘Wait one minute, Roger,’ said poor Katherine. Her heart was so full that she feared she would not be able to control herself unless he gave her a minute or two to recover. ‘I’ll come to you directly ; go in and wait.’

He did so. He paced the room, impatiently consulting his watch every few minutes. A quarter of an hour—half an hour passed, and still she did not come, and each moment his anger against her gained strength.

She was in her own room ; she was weak with illness, overwrought with the excitement of the morning ; but still she knew that the time had come to tell Roger Hackblock that she did not love him. It was such a terrible thing to say. She lingered, trying to nerve herself for the effort, but she had no idea how long she was keeping him waiting. She thought she had been five minutes when she had been more than half an hour. She was just going down, when a note was brought to her. It was as follows :

‘KATHERINE,

‘I have waited for you exactly five-and-thirty minutes ; longer than that I do not choose to wait. If you did not intend to see me, why not say so at once ? I came home full of pleasure, because I was going to see you. What a miserable meeting it has been ! I know you are ill, but no illness can excuse such unkindness ; and why did your illness not keep you away from your friend Mr. Barrington ?

‘Your aggrieved,
‘ROGER.’

‘My aggrieved Roger !’ said Katherine angrily, for her irritation against him was so great that she was disposed to be angry with

him for everything he did ; even his Christian name was an offence to her, though she must have known that it could not have been his own choice. 'That's how he writes to me !' she exclaimed. 'Then I'll write to him ! I'll write at once, and tell him that I do not love him at all, and don't care how he writes to me, or wish ever to see him again !'

She took pen and paper and sat down, but hardly had she dipped her pen in the ink, than a sudden revulsion of feeling took place in her. She covered her face with her hands, laid her head on the table, and cried like a child. She had thought to cover her paper with hard and unkind words ; had believed that it would be easy to tell him that she rejoiced to be freed from her engagement to him ; but instead of that, the smooth white page before her was blistered with tears—tears that could not be repressed, and they came faster and faster. He had done her no wrong. It was she who had been false and unkind—she who was about to write a letter which would cut him to the heart ; and not Roger alone, but his father and mother would be hurt by her, and by what she was going to do ! He had been as good to her as it was in his nature to be, and they had treated her like a child of their own. The more she thought of these things, the more she wept. She did not know how long a time had passed, when she felt a loving hand laid on her shoulder ; she heard a voice say, 'Katherine.' And then her mother's soft, warm cheek was laid against hers—her mother, who had not been upstairs for years, had stolen up to comfort her. Katherine flung her arms round her neck, and sobbed :

'Mother, have you seen Roger ?'

'Yes, dear, he came soon after eleven. We sent to tell you, and found that you had gone out. I supposed you were in bed, and was shocked to hear what you had done, but said you were sure to come back directly, and he waited ; but when the rain began to fall, he grew so uneasy lest you should make yourself ill again, that I did my best to direct him to where he was likely to find you. I suppose he did find you ; but what has happened ? Why are you crying ? Why did he go away so angrily ? Clarke saw him, and she said that he looked quite white, and could hardly speak.'

'Mother,' said Katherine, 'I can't marry him !'

Mrs. Carey looked as one may look who beholds the tide rolling in, and knows that some strong sea-wall on which he has hitherto counted for safety is broken down.

'You can't marry Roger Hackblock ?' said she, and turned so pale that Katherine came to her support, fearing that she was going to faint. That fear was groundless. Mrs. Carey soon recovered, and Katherine said :

'Mother, I am unhappy ; more unhappy than I can tell you ; but I really can't marry him.'

Mrs. Carey shook her head drearily, and gasped :

'You must talk to your father, dear child ; I am hardly fit for a conversation of this kind ; but that's not why I shrink from it. I'd go through anything if I could help you, but I can't. It's of no use to talk to me.'

'Why is it of no use ? do tell me why you say that.'

'Because it is true. If you tell me you won't marry Roger, you grieve me, because I think it is for your happiness to marry him ; but if you say it is not, all I can say is, on no account think of doing such a thing. That is my feeling, but I am afraid it won't be your father's.'

Before Katherine could speak, Clarke opened the door, and said :

'Mr. Carey is in your room, ma'am ; he wants to see you. He appears much put out about something ;' and, as she said this, the maid fixed two most inquisitive twinkling jet-black eyes on the mother and daughter, who so obviously were in the same plight as her master.

'Father !' exclaimed Katherine. 'Father at home at this time ?'

'He came in a hansom, Miss Katherine, driving a tearing pace ; and Dilston told me master said the cabman was to have whatever he asked for, along of his having drove so fast.'

Mrs. Carey and her daughter exchanged glances ; they knew that he had come home because he had seen Roger.

'I'd better go,' murmured Mrs. Carey. 'Katherine, come with me.'

Katherine shrank back ; but what did it matter whether she confronted her angry father ten minutes sooner or ten minutes later ? —the terrible moment must inevitably come. She shivered, but rose up, and was just putting her arm round her mother to help her back to her own room, when Mr. Carey himself appeared ; and, in a cheerful voice which would have befitted a father of a family welcoming all his children home to a joyful Christmas gathering, said :

'You upstairs, dear wife ? and Kitty well again ! That is a sight for sair e'en !'

'Why have you come home at this unusual time, Cornelius ?' inquired Mrs. Carey anxiously.

'I had to hurry back for a business-paper I forgot to take with me this morning. I did not want it, but I wanted to know it was safe. Here it is !' and he flourished a schedule of imposing appearance ; but still did not altogether deceive his wife, who felt sure that he was assuming an appearance of gaiety, lest his real manner should distress her. 'Wouldn't you be better in your own room, dear ?' said he. 'I'll carry you there. Come with us, Kitty, and open the doors, there's a darling !' and, so saying, he took his shadowy wife in his arms, and tenderly carried her to her own room.

CHAPTER XIX.

'It is very good for strength
To know that some one needs you to be strong.'

Aurora Leigh,

KATHERINE only accompanied her father as far as the threshold of her mother's room, then she crept back to her own. It was not that she had any hope of escaping an explanation with him—that she knew to be impossible; but she had some vague feeling that she could go through it better in her own room. It was homelike to her; she had been shut up almost alone in it for so many days now, that each article of furniture was a friend and companion to her. She dreaded the unfamiliar aspect of the downstairs rooms, especially when she was about to see another sight still more unfamiliar—her father's face in anger. It was certain that he would be angry; so far, he had been acting a part in the interest of her mother's health. When he and she were alone together, his true mind would appear. His prompt return after seeing Roger was enough of itself to alarm her. What reason could he have for desiring this marriage beyond a parent's natural anxiety to see his child well established in life? Her mother had said that he had one; what could it be? She asked herself this question repeatedly; but had no means of answering it.

In a very short time, after depositing his wife on her sofa again, Mr. Carey re-entered Katherine's room. The effort to conceal his anxiety had vanished with the occasion which called it forth; he now came in listlessly, with eyes heavy with the expectation of sorrow. He dropped into a chair by Katherine's writing-table as one who had not strength left to stand, drearily rubbed his forehead, as if to smooth away a sense of confusion left by some scene which had been strangely and unexpectedly painful; then he turned his sad eyes on his daughter, and said:

'I suppose you know why I have come home at this unusual time, Katherine? All this is very hard on a poor old man like me!'

Katherine faltered. Her father, though sixty, always passed for a hale man of forty-nine or fifty. He walked briskly, held his head high, and looked about with eyes sparkling with kindness and ready intelligence. She had never thought of him as an old man; but now, when on hearing these words she looked up, he seemed to be a broken-down, dispirited man, verging on four score. She could not bear to look at him; her eyes fell, and she drew one quick breath of pain.

'Let me hear what you have to say directly,' said he.

The words were not especially harsh, but they appeared so to her; for he had never spoken so harshly to her before.

'I think you have come home because you have seen Roger,' said

Katherine ; and she spoke thus straightforwardly, because she was courageous by nature, but a stronger reason was that she wished to spare her father all unnecessary pain.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I have seen Roger, and he was in a very excited state. Now, will you tell me exactly what took place between you ? Katherine, I don’t feel well. Tell me all, without forcing me to put many questions.’

‘That is what I wish to do, father. Very little took place between us. He came back from Hamburg this morning without writing to say he was coming. He came here, and I was out. Mother told him where to find me, and he came into the park to me.’

Here Mr. Carey interrupted her by saying : ‘Then your mother knew where you were ?’

‘Yes ; she told him where to find me, and he did find me.

‘That’s better ! Go on !’

‘I was in the park with Mr. Barrington.’

‘Well, don’t stop.’

‘Roger came up to us looking very cross. After a few words had been said, Mr. Barrington left us, and Roger came home with me. He said he wanted to talk to me, and I was quite willing to be talked to, for I had something to say to him myself ; but I was rather frightened, and asked him to wait two or three minutes, and ran upstairs to think how I was to begin. I kept him waiting too long, though I did not know I was long, and he left the house in a very bad humour.’

‘And you had no quarrel—nothing more than this passed ?’ said Mr. Carey, in a voice which betokened that his load of care was somewhat lightened.

‘He wrote that letter there—read it if you like—and I was just going to answer it when mother came. You came soon after. That’s all—now I have told you the truth.’

Mr. Carey read the note, and said : ‘Then do answer his note, and take care what you say, for he is extremely angry ; and what’s more, I don’t wonder. It is a very odd thing for you to be walking about in the park with Mr. Barrington—most extraordinary—and can’t be allowed for a moment ! I hope you don’t make a practice of it—Roger says you do. When did you last see him there ?’

‘On the 2nd of May. I remember the day, because it was the day of the Academy Private View.’

Mr. Carey looked puzzled. This was the middle of June. If she had not seen Barrington since the 2nd of May, Roger was unreasonable, for there was little to complain of.

‘You are sure you have not walked with him since the 2nd of May ?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘Tell Roger so, then. Write him an affectionate letter at once, and I’ll take it. He is at the office now. We agreed that he was

to wait there till I saw you, and went back to him. Write a line, and I'll take it—come, I have no time to lose.'

'No, father! If you are going back to him, there is no need for me to write. Tell him from me that I am very unhappy and grieved to cause him pain, but that I cannot be his wife.'

Mr. Carey started up, and said: 'Not be his wife! Don't take a few unpleasant words so seriously! Not be his wife! My dear good girl, you don't seem to know what you are talking about'

'Yes, I do. I don't love him. I long to be freed from my engagement.'

Mr. Carey's countenance fell, and he had to support himself by one hand against the table. But he was so nervous that he could not keep his hand steady.

'You say you want to be freed from your engagement, child—you must be mad! How can you ever find a husband like Roger Hackblock? You must be stark mad.'

'No; I am not mad, and my mind is made up.'

Mr. Carey dropped into his seat again, saying, with a groan: 'Then let me tell you that you have made up your mind to something which will cost your mother's life, and probably mine too.'

Katherine almost smiled, his words seemed to her so much stronger than the occasion merited. She resented such exaggeration; but as he remained silent and seemed to be convinced of the truth of his own assertion, she said:

'Why should it cost my mother's life?'

'I will tell you. Your mother's life depends on comfort, and care, and good nursing. When she is deprived of these things, there is nothing for her but death. You must know that yourself.'

Katherine did know it—knew it so well, that the very suggestion of such deprivation brought an odd sense of tension at her heart which amounted to pain; but she fought against it, and said:

'But why should she be deprived of them?'

'If you break off with Roger she must be—there's no help for it; she must. Child, you don't understand things. It's no fault of yours that you don't. I'll explain. I am a partner in Hackblock, Higgins, and Hackblock—even you know as much as that—but I brought nothing into the business except power of work and good will. I have now been a partner for nearly twenty years. It will be twenty in the beginning of November, and then our term of partnership expires. When that time comes we shall have a meeting, when all the books will be examined, and everything gone into.'

Katherine was listening most sedulously, but to her all this had no meaning.

'Of course, when that day comes, the partnership is dissolved,' insisted Mr. Carey. 'Each partner will then have his share of profits assigned to him, and then our firm will either re-construct

itself with the same partners as before, or some of us may be left out. You understand, don't you, that a partnership is only a matter of mutual agreement—none of us has any right to insist on being taken in.'

Katherine feared that she did understand, but to be quite sure, said : 'Do you mean that there is any chance of the Hackblocks turning you out of the firm if any of us did anything to offend them?'

'That's just what I do mean ! Every chance of it, I should say. Hackblock is a stern, unforgiving fellow ! He is my partner, but that does not shut my eyes to the truth. He would most certainly work me out—he has all the power—Higgins is worse than nobody.'

'Well, be worked out : let him do exactly as he likes ; and if he does behave so ill, just you set up another business ! You know how to manage it quite as well as he does—a great deal better, I should say ; you are far cleverer than he. Set up another business of your own, and defy him !'

Mr. Carey buried his face in his hands, and almost groaned as he answered :

'But the money, child—tell me where that's to come from ? I have spent more than I ought for years—my house costs me too much ; everything costs me too much. I found out years ago that I was overdoing myself, but could not bear to think of moving into a small house, or living in a poor way, when your mother would feel it so terribly ! It will have to be done some day, but things must go on as they are as long as she lives.'

'Haven't you enough to retire on, father ? Mother would understand your living in a less expensive way, if you retired from business altogether—she would think that you were willing to have less money for the sake of seeing more of her.'

He shook his head. 'If I retire, I retire on nothing. Every day makes my position clearer to me. I did not know how much I had overdrawn until all this overhauling of the books began. Hackblock has money without end, and has left thousands in the business that I knew nothing about. I thought he drew out his profits just as I drew mine. Higgins has done the same, he has hardly drawn anything for years ; when the books are made up, it will be found that I have had every penny that I am entitled to.'

'Explain to me exactly what this means,' said Katherine, speaking slowly and painfully. She was straining every nerve to understand.

'It means that if they like to press me hard, I'm a beggar ! That instead of having money to draw, I may even have money to pay—money I never can pay, for it is gone ! They can if they like decline to renew my partnership. They can do exactly what they choose, for I am at their mercy ! I'm not one bit better off than I was twenty years ago, when it was thought such a generous thing for them to take me into the firm !'

‘At any rate you are not worse off, father. They thought it advisable to take you then, of course they will do the same now.’

Mr. Carey made an attempt to speak, but failed. Very anxiously Katherine said, ‘Father, do you really think they would decline?’

‘Not if we go on as we are doing now. At present we are dear friends; brothers who work happily together—brothers can quarrel though—how do you think we should work together if you broke off with Roger? You know how his heart has been set on marrying you ever since he was a boy! Katherine, that engagement has been my very salvation! Until you promised to marry him, I used to be in despair, when I looked at your poor dear mother, and thought that my criminal folly might perhaps be the means of bringing her to the grave in misery. How could she struggle? Can you imagine her in dismal lodgings in some cheap neighbourhood, without even a servant to wait on her?’

The shock of this revelation was overpowering to Katherine. She had thought her father so rich—believed herself to be placed so high out of reach of miserable money misfortunes, so certain never to lose her happy home so long as she chose to keep it. It was maddening to have imperilled their whole future by simple want of thought! She raised her wretched eyes to his, but did not speak. Even then outward objects smote painfully on her senses, and she was dimly conscious that her room was crowded with luxuries of all kinds, which had cost large sums of money. Books, china, furniture, everything there was of the best and bravest, nothing had ever been thought too good for her. On all sides, though she saw these things without knowing that she saw them, she was somehow made aware of sheeny satin, or bright mirrors, or gilded ornaments which pitilessly flashed in her face the bitter fact that for them and for things like unto them, the stable foundations of home and its happiness had gradually been filed away.

Mr. Carey continued: ‘I ought to have put by a large sum every year so as to make myself independent of them, but I’ve not, and that’s the mischief of it! Well, it has not gone in selfish indulgences, I haven’t that to reproach myself with. It was for her that most of it was spent, and I did not discover that I was exceeding what was prudent until she was so accustomed to the little luxuries which I gathered together about her, to make her unhappy life more bearable, that I could not find it in my heart to take them away from her. You don’t know what I’ve suffered. It is a terrible thing to a man to draw cheque after cheque when he knows that he is using the very life-blood of his business life, that he is putting himself at the mercy of those with whom he is associated.’

‘But, father, if we retrenched now we might save quantities of money; there are many things which we could do without.’

‘Very few in your dear mother’s lifetime; besides, that does not so much matter now: it is the getting over November peaceably

which is so critical ; if they renew my partnership, I can retrench, or do anything. Katherine, you must help me.'

Katherine had expected her father to talk to her like a dread tyrant, and lo ! he was a humble suitor for her help ! Alas ! she felt that this course which he had taken was infinitely more difficult to resist than any amount of wrath.

'What can I do ?' said she faintly.

'Let us quietly talk over your feeling with regard to Roger. You say you do not love him.'

'I do not love him at all. I can never marry him.'

'Is there anyone whom you would like to marry better ?'

Katherine's ivory-coloured face flamed crimson. 'Father,' she said, 'don't ask that ; even he himself has never asked me that !'

Mr. Carey understood ; this sentence was enigmatical, but the feeling with which she spoke was sufficiently plain. 'Thank God for that ! You must not give up Roger and all that marrying him means, for a mere passing fancy. If you did, you would probably lament your folly as long as your life lasted. It's my duty to warn you, child, and I do warn you ; what can you know of the world, what can any girl of your age know of it ? You must think, and think hard too, before you make up your mind to anything so serious. Give Roger a longer trial—let your engagement go on six months or a year longer. He is a good steady fellow, and entirely devoted to you ; his family are devoted to you too ; what more would you have ? You have known them all since you were a child—it's not like going among strangers. You will never meet anyone more likely to make you happy. Roger knows you have no fortune—he takes you without a penny and loves you just the same. His father and mother welcome you as if you were a great heiress. I insist on your giving this a further trial. For my sake, dear Katherine, let things go on as they are for six months at least, and during that time do your very best to love him, and avoid the sight of this Barrington. That will give time for us to reconstruct our partnership on its old footing. It will give me a chance of retrenching quietly in things which won't affect your dear mother's comfort—it will make all right and easy—and it's good advice I'm giving you, for you ought to try to like Roger. In this case it is most emphatically true that the path of duty is the path of safety.'

Katherine was silent. Was he not deceiving himself ? Was he not turning the path of duty in a self-interested direction ? Might not the safety, of which he spoke, be the safety of the family fortunes, and the wreck of the family honour ? Alas ! she almost feared so. What she understood was this, though the thought was not put in words by her father—that whatever she might ultimately be compelled to do, he wished her, at all events, not to decline to be Roger's wife, until the business of the partnership was once more put on a sure basis. That done, if she still persisted in her in-

tention, the step he so much disliked might be taken ; then she might release herself from her engagement. It would then give him great pain ; but if she did it now, it would inevitably ruin him.

Katherine sighed heavily : her heart told her that in six months' time she would not love Roger one whit better than she did now, and that the honest course was to lose no time in telling him the truth. But her father ! She looked at him to see how he would bear to hear her say so. His eyes were eagerly fixed on her face : he was trying to ascertain the bent of her thoughts. There was little enough of hope in the poor old man's expression. His hands were straying nervously about the table. Her heart ached for him. There he sat, patiently waiting for her decision. He had not uttered one reproach worthy of the name during the whole interview ; and, when she looked back on the past, she could not remember one occasion on which he had spoken unkindly to her. Better marry Roger to-morrow, even if she never knew another hour of happiness, than give pain to her own dear father. And yet how hard it was to consent to what he wished ! She would make one last struggle to be free. If she could see any hope of her father's being able to bear her refusal, she would refuse.

'Father,' she said, 'don't look like that ! I can't bear it. You make me so wretched. I ought to break off with Roger at once—I feel I ought. If I say I must break off with him, tell me what you would say ?'

'It's not what I would say, child, but what I would do. I tell you honestly I could not face the future—I should quietly put myself in the river !'

'Dear father, no, you would not ; but it is agony even to hear you say such a thing ! Go to Roger, and say what you like.'

'You promise me to let your engagement go on for six months longer ?'

'Yes.'

'And you feel that you can keep your promise ? It would not do to promise and fail !'

'I can keep my promise, and I will,' she replied resolutely.

'Katherine,' said he simply and gratefully, 'you have saved my life ! You are sure that nothing has been said about breaking off ?' he added eagerly.

'Nothing.'

'Then he is only irritated because he found you with that dishonourable fellow Barrington ? However, I will tell him you have not seen Barrington since the 2nd of May until to-day. Let me be quite certain that that is true.'

'Perfectly true, so far as seeing him alone is concerned ; I have seen him once since then, when he came to call on mother.'

'He must come here no more ! If you promise to try to love

Roger, your word must be kept in all honour. Katherine, promise me solemnly not to have any further communication with Barrington. I cannot allow it. He has not behaved well. He has taken advantage of your youth, and your mother's illness. It must be,' said he, 'unless you wish to kill me;' for he saw that Katherine hesitated.

'You must let me write one note to him—it need not be a long one, but I must write it; and then I faithfully promise not to see him again while I am engaged to Roger. There!'

Such was her exclamation; for now she felt that not only had she given up what was dearer to her than life, but that she had entered on a path of difficulty and danger.

'My darling, I am afraid that you really have been letting yourself be rather led away from Roger,' said Mr. Carey, kissing her cold cheek; 'and it's so like a girl to think of tearing herself loose from a thing which begins to feel rather irksome, without so much as making one effort to bear it! It would be very wrong not to try to be true to Roger; and, mind you, you need never give him up for Barrington; for, even if I had a good opinion of him, which, after this, I never shall have, he's not a man whom I would allow you to marry.'

Katherine could not contest this point now; she let him say what he would.

'God bless you, dear,' said he; 'I trust to your promise.'

And then he departed, leaving his daughter alone. There she sat the livelong afternoon, not knowing what to wish for—not daring to pray that heaven would be kind and deliver her from Roger; for her deliverance would bring destruction on her father. Nothing could profit her now. Whether Roger was placable or implacable was of little consequence to her. If her father came home looking joyous, one person at any rate would be happy.

CHAPTER XX.

*'Long. Nay, my choler's ended,
She is a most sweet lady.'*

Love's Labour's Lost.

*'On my soul
Lies such an infinite clog of massy dullness.'*

FORD.

ROGER was only too happy to be reconciled to his Katherine. He was reconciled: and, not being a man of fervours and transports, expected no particular effusiveness on her part on that occasion, and saw nothing to complain of in her demeanour afterwards. In point of fact, he had never really believed it possible that she could wish to break off such an appropriate engagement. He looked on her meetings with Barrington as little more than a thoughtless and

indiscreet way of passing an idle half-hour, and on Barrington as a pushing fellow, who took advantage of her inexperience. Roger exacted a promise from her to renounce these walks; and, not content with that, made two or three wise arrangements, all calculated to act as hindrances should she be tempted to break her word. Katherine had been in the habit of going out at eleven. After this quarrel with Roger, Mrs. Hackblock came punctually every morning at that hour to take her a drive, and he himself devoted the greater part of the afternoon to her society.

Katherine secretly resented this. She hated being watched. She had promised Roger to walk with Mr. Barrington no more. Did he suppose that she was likely to forget that she had done so? She had made another and much more solemn compact with her father. The next six months were to be spent by her in trying to love Roger. She had not given the promise lightly; she firmly resolved to act up to it. She had known him ever since she was a child, and had always loved him as a brother. Nothing could ever make him an indifferent person to her; but what a pity it was that he would not let things go on as they were! It was so stupid not to let well alone! As a brother, she could have loved him for ever—as a lover, she might possibly find herself hating him. She thought of these things incessantly. Sometimes she was touched by his love for herself: more usually, she hated him for being so persistent in his determination to have her. It was that determination and that inveterate persistence which had caused all her trouble. She might have liked him better, too, if she had but seen less of him. You must love a man very much before you can endure to see him every day of your life. Every afternoon came Roger—every morning brought Mrs. Hackblock.

There was scarcely an hour of the day when Katherine was out of hearing of Hackblock views of men and manners. Roger's aim in life often struck her as low, but then she didn't exactly know what men's aims ought to be like. She was certain that his mother's were not only low, but sordid. Rich as she was, she wanted to be richer. She left enterprise to the men of her family; if they could make thousands by well-planted strokes of business, they were wise and great according to their kind, and that kind was one of the very highest and best of which male human nature was capable. So far as regarded herself, Mrs. Hackblock took what she believed to be the most elevated line open to her, and if she could make one penny do the work of two, felt that she had a right to be both proud and happy. She was aware of Katherine's little aberration from the right path—knew about her walks with 'a man who sat up late, writing things in a hurry for newspapers'—it was wrong, but the dear child was not to blame; there was no real harm in Katherine; all that could be said was that she had had, so to speak, no mother, and had nothing with which to occupy her mind. Mrs. Hackblock,

who often lamented the extravagance of the Carey's way of living, resolved to take Katherine's mind into her own special keeping, and to store it so full of useful knowledge of every description, that no place would be left either for girlish nonsense or for wasteful ideas of housekeeping. Every day during their drives she laboured with this object in view. Sometimes Katherine listened, and sometimes she did not. When she did, traces of the fact remained for hours.

'Have you had a pleasant drive, my darling?' her mother inquired one day.

'Oh, very!' said Katherine, with subdued irony. 'Mother, do you know how to save buying all kinds of traps, and paste, and poison, and things? I'll tell you. Take a cucumber—every house has a cucumber sometimes, so there is no need to buy one on purpose—just use it when you have it. Pare it—cucumbers have to be pared anyhow, mother, so this costs you nothing. Cut its rind off delicately with a sharp knife, and strew the parings about your kitchen-floor at night, and then you will entirely destroy all your black-beetles.'

Mrs. Carey looked aghast! She lived in an ideal world, into which, up to the present painful moment, no black-beetle had ever penetrated.

'My dear,' she exclaimed, 'I don't think I quite know what a black-beetle is! Hush! I don't want to have them described to me! Horrible things! Please don't mention them.'

'But I never saw one,' said Katherine. 'Mrs. Hackblock says I shall when I have a house of my own. Mother, I thought one good of having servants was that they stood between you and terrible sights of this kind.'

'Of course they do. What does Mrs. Hackblock mean?'

'She says these cucumber-parings will save a sixpenny box of beetle-paste, and that I must put them on the floors myself, because no servant will take the trouble.'

'Poor dear, and you don't like to talk of such things,' said Mrs. Carey, gazing anxiously at her child's pale face.

Why was that face always so pale now? She knew nothing of the scene which had taken place between Katherine and her father.

'Not much. I think I prefer to hear how to clean windows without spending money on wash-leather. Shall I tell you? It will be just as useful to you, dear mother, as it will be to me, for I am quite sure that I shall never trouble myself to do it. Perhaps you know what a wash-leather is—I didn't! Well, it's a soft washing thing that costs a whole shilling, or you may get a good one for tenpence, mother, if you rummage judiciously about in the bundle they bring you to choose from; but if you take a *Daily News*, or *Standard*—after you have read it, mother, for you must first get a

thorough pennyworth in that way—then if you wet the paper, it cleans the window as well as any wash-leather, and costs nothing. Think of that, mother ; it saves quite a penny, and that is something in a house where there is not more than fifteen thousand a-year to spend. Stop, I'll tell you some more economies. Do you know that if the cooks would only consent to use it, you can make the crumbs stick to fried soles by painting them over with milk instead of using eggs ; it is not so good, but it saves eggs.'

Mrs. Carey sighed, and said : ' I wish I could go out driving with you, my darling. I am afraid all this bores you.'

' Inexpressibly ! I don't think I should dislike real cooking, but to sit and listen to Mrs. Hackblock doling out scraps of knowledge piecemeal ! It may be very useful, but what possible sense is there in telling me that I am to use milk for soles instead of eggs, when I am never likely to use either ? If she took me into the kitchen and showed me the difference between the two ways, that might be of some use ; indeed, I think I should rather like it. Mother, I have a great idea ! I'll go to the School of Cookery.'

' Do you want to learn to cook ? ' asked Mrs. Carey, who could not conceive such a possibility.

' Yes—no. I want to get out of Mrs. Hackblock's way. Besides, it will be the best means of silencing her. She'll hold her tongue when I have gone through a course of teaching at South Kensington, for I shall know more about it than she. Oh, happy thought ! Oh, blessed idea ! Mother, I'll go to-morrow. I shall have to be there at ten, and stay till five.'

' It will be very hard work.'

' Not half such hard work as having to sit still and listen to her.'

Katherine was unfeignedly glad that she had thought of this. She would thus escape both Roger and Mrs. Hackblock for a large portion of each day, for, try as she might to love Roger, she was not equal to keeping up the effort for so many consecutive hours.

Mr. Carey made some feeble objections, but Katherine said she wanted to go, and that was enough. He had always been indulgent to her, and was doubly so now. All was going on well, and he was happy and hopeful. He had let his house in Scotland for the shooting-season ; that was so much to the good. He had tried to retrench at home, but that was not so easy. He had never spent a farthing on any luxury for himself, so nothing could be cut down there ; and so far as the house was concerned, one dish of vegetables occasionally, seemed to be all that could be dispensed with. He gave up two or three newspapers which had got into the habit of coming to his house, and that done, relaxed his efforts until November came, and the meeting was over which would decide his future. If all went as he hoped, retrenchment would not be so necessary. He felt that all would end well. The Hackblocks were never away from No. 15. What more could be desired ?

Most people know all that there is to know about the School of Cookery which flourishes at South Kensington. Katherine felt quite a good little kitchen-maid, when in a plain morning-dress, large apron with pocket, bib, and brown-holland sleeves drawn over her other sleeves, she stood in the small dressing-room attached to the school, taking a last look at herself just before the clock struck ten. The regular course of instruction comprises one week spent in cleaning kitchen utensils, a fortnight in cooking for artisans, another fortnight of demonstration, when maidens, meek or otherwise, sit in a lecture-room watching the preparation of dainty dishes, and listening to the reason for each proceeding. Then comes a fortnight in the practice-kitchen, where the pupil has to do cookery of all kinds herself.

There was not time for all this before the school closed for the holidays, so Katherine, after some expenditure of thought, determined to go through the week of cleaning, and then to spend a fortnight in the practice-kitchen. She knew she would never have to cook for artisans ; besides—the greater includes the less—if she learnt how to make a plum-pudding in the practice-kitchen, that would teach her how to make a currant dumpling or a suet-pudding, which was what was taught in the artisan's, and so on. She was glad she had come ; this was a totally new atmosphere to her, and she breathed freely in it. Dutifully she followed the band of pupils to the kitchens, where a formidable array of dirty pans, kettles, knives, and such like things, awaited their approach. The women who entered the kitchen were as motley a group as the culinary vessels with which they were so soon to occupy themselves. All sorts and conditions of women were freely mixed together, and for the time being, placed under the dominion of a couple of servants. Here were servants who wanted to improve themselves ; married women who wanted to improve their servants ; girls who wanted to be teachers ; others who longed to fling themselves into some abysmal gulf of discomfort at home, and thought that they could do it better with a little knowledge in their heads. Very amusing some of these people were ! The real ladies accepted the work which was given them, and set about doing it with hearty good will, saying little or nothing about dirt or difficulty. The would-be ladies tried to assume the airs of princesses driven out of their kingdoms, and kept up a continual buzz of exclamation to the servants, to themselves, and to every one who came in their way, about the strangeness of finding themselves doing such menial work, and the all but utter impossibility of overcoming their unfamiliarity with it sufficiently to be able to win any marks. They prattled much of what Mrs. this or that would think if she came in and saw how they were employed. Most of them showed a strong disposition to avoid all contact with base metals by wearing cheap dirty-white kid gloves. None of them had apparently ever been

brought face to face with a black pan before, nor did any seem to have been positively informed that kitchen utensils did not clean themselves. Even Katherine, ignorant and useless as she had become, by dint of hard training, produced a considerable change in the appearance of one of the objects committed to her charge, before some small tradesmen's daughters had nerved themselves to the effort of taking off their gloves.

She, and a rather forward young person with a good deal of silver jewellery dangling about her, had been sent into a corner with a brass pan, an iron pan, and a tin kettle a-piece to clean before twelve o'clock.

'Oh Lor'! and aren't some of the young ladies here vulgar?' said this young person to Katherine, as she went. 'One can't help wondering where they can have lived. I am so glad I've been put with you. I stared hard about me, as soon as I came in, for some people of my own sort, and just wished they would set me and you on to work together, and you see they have! Pans to clean, have we? How funny Mrs. Tallmadge would think it if she saw them giving me pans to clean, but I am not going to make a fuss, even if I have worse to do than that, so let us begin. Mrs. Tallmadge need never know, unless I go and tell her.'

The speaker was a fair, freckled girl, stout and comely, brisk in her movements, and remarkably aggressive. Katherine gave her a few civil words, and much elbow-room, but she had a talent for getting into disputes with those around her, and was not long in exercising it.

'I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted with your name, miss, or I'd certainly use it when addressing you,' said she to a very pretty girl on the other side of her, who was likewise cleaning a pan. 'I mean no offence either; but I wish to observe, as a lady to a lady, you know, that you keep dipping your hand into my silver-sand jar instead of your own, and I don't like it.'

Having said this, she looked at Katherine to see if she was admiring her courtly grace of manner.

The girl thus addressed, a slight ladylike young creature, shrank back for a moment from this voluble attack, but soon recovered herself, and begged pardon.

'Nay, meet me civilly, and I'll treat you civilly,' said she of the bangles, much mollified. 'That's my way, and anybody will tell you it is. I am so glad to find myself working with persons of my own sort that you may take as much sand as you choose, if you like mine better than your own. People tell you that you need not mind coming in contact with the vulgar herd at places like this, for you have nothing to do but shake off both them and their ways and words when you get home again, but I like to hold myself aloof from what's vulgar when I can, and I do believe it's best! Oh my! Young woman, do take care what you are about!'

This was addressed to a girl who, after spending a long time in cleaning a carving-knife and fork, suddenly caught sight of a teacher who was disengaged, and that being a very unusual occurrence, made a charge in her direction, knife in hand, to know if it was necessary to do any more to it. The teachers, as before said, were a couple of comely, obliging servants, who went from one pupil to another explaining, directing, and seeing if the work was up to the mark. Many a mistress might with advantage have taken a pattern from these maids, for though for once the tables were turned, and it fell to their lot to order the mistresses about, they did it most sweetly and prettily. There was no abuse of power, and, strange to say, no undue elation when the weary ladies, after struggling for hours to get things bright which didn't want to be made bright, at last committed moral suicide, and exclaimed that 'it was simply shameful to ask people to make their arms ache with trying to clean things which had been used! How could anything be expected to look really bright unless it was fresh out of the shop?'

Katherine's pretty hands were full of soap and sand with which she was scouring the iron pan. Her brass pans were bright and clean, and lovely to behold; but her back ached, her feet were weary with standing, and her day's work was not half done! 'I had not the slightest idea that servants worked so hard!' said she, to her companions in toil. 'Had you?'

'Servants! I never think about servants!' said the girl with the bangles and locket. 'Why should I? So long as they move about quickly, and get me all I want, that's all I think about them! Mrs. Tallmadge often tells me what fine easy times I have, with nothing whatever to do but ring the bell and give my orders.'

'I always think our servants have a great deal to do,' said the girl on the other side. 'But I never knew that their work was so tiring. They don't make their things so bright as we are doing, but perhaps we shouldn't either, if we had to do them every day of our lives.'

'Every day! Oh Lor', how can you talk of such a thing? Mrs. Tallmadge cried out the minute she heard I was coming here, "Jemima Jane won't have patience to go through a week of such hard labour," and there you are talking of my doing it every day of my life! Not if I know it. No indeed!'

Katherine felt inclined to smile; the other girl perhaps did smile—at any rate, Jemima Jane thought she did, for she exclaimed indignantly, while a warm flush overspread her cheek:

'As a lady to a lady, I wish to inform you that to behave as you are doing now is no way of going on at all, and I won't stand it! Anybody that knows me will tell you that I can't stand ill-breeding, and it's very bad ill-breeding to go and laugh in a person's face.'

'I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be rude. I don't think I did smile.'

‘Oh yes you did, and after that you won’t get me to associate with you!’

Hereupon a teacher came and informed Jemima Jane that no talking was allowed, and that she must attend to what she was doing and not enter into conversation with her fellow-workers.

‘All right,’ observed that young person in an audible whisper. You might have had some reason for coming and saying that to me a few minutes since, but I have just refused to associate with either of these two!’

They took it quietly, which was best, and Jemima Jane became silent. Up to this time she had been the only talker, henceforth the clink of metal alone was heard, and the steady rub, rub, of the workers. And so it went on even after the mid-day pause, until at length Jemima Jane suddenly exclaimed, ‘Now, I’ve done everything to those things that I mean to do, and I’m off! I dare say I have kept Mrs. Tallmadge waiting as it is. She said she would call for me in her new conveyance and take me a good long drive. Well, I’ll wash my hands—my poor ill-used hands! Good morning to you all!’

So saying she departed, and the girl with whom she had had so many little contentions smiled brightly at Katherine, and said, ‘As a lady to a lady, I can’t help remarking to you that I am very glad she has gone! Let us try to work together to-morrow—you and I, I mean.’

‘I should like it,’ replied Katherine warmly, for her new friend was so pretty and graceful that it was quite a pleasure to look at her.

‘I wonder why Jemima Jane came here?’

‘I wonder!’ said Katherine meditatively, as she held up a sieve she had been cleaning, to see if she could consider it done. ‘Indeed I rather wonder why any of these people did?’

‘I’ll tell you why I came,’ said the other. ‘I live with an aunt, and somehow or other she has a tiresome way with her servants and can’t keep one more than a month. That’s why she and I both thought I had better come here. If I learn how to do everything, we might find some docile girls who would let me train them. Stop, here’s the teacher coming, and I do so want to ask her about my pan. Oh no, she is looking at that table. I hope she is telling that poor girl she has scrubbed it very well. We shall have that to do. My pan is not quite clean, you say; why, I was just thinking it looked quite beautiful enough to be put on one of the drawing-room tables! More lemon!—how extravagant it seems to clean brass with lemons! I know I ought not to talk. Yes, I’ll hold my tongue.’

She was silent for a while, but during that time looked rather earnestly at Katherine once or twice, and then said, ‘Do you know that your face is quite familiar to me? Excuse me; but are you Miss Carey?’

Katherine almost started, then she said, 'Yes; but how can you know that?'

'Because you are so like those beautiful pictures in the exhibition. A cousin of mine bought them. He raved about them, and was wild to be introduced to you. You have no idea what a fuss he made! Oh, do look at that girl's hands, they are as black and shining as the grate she is busy with; but, as I was just saying, you have no idea how he wanted to meet you! I think once all was arranged for him to do so. Mr. Davenport, the artist, asked him to luncheon at his house one day when you were to be there, and then after all you wouldn't go. He was so bitterly disappointed! Why wouldn't you let the poor fellow have a sight of you?'

Katherine drew back a little. She didn't think that Mr. Carew had behaved generously about those pictures. The invitation to meet him had come while she was ill in bed, but she didn't think she would have gone in any case. 'I was ill,' she said, 'ill in bed, and could not.'

'The Davenports are paying him a visit in the country now; I dare say you know that, though. They are dear people; I like both of them, and so does my cousin. You ought to know my cousin. If he saw you now, he would want a picture of you in your cooking-costume.'

Katherine turned away indignantly.

'Don't be vexed; he is a dear good fellow.'

'If your name is Carew,' said Katherine, after a pause, for she was too much offended at first to speak, 'it is very like mine.'

'No, it's not Carew—my name is Barbara Linley. Now this abominable thing has come clean. I wonder how many marks I shall get for it? Oh, Jupiter! how weary are my spirits! I mean my legs; and that's what Rosalind meant, too. They may say what they like, but I will not clean that gas-stove—it's not in the bond; and those girls have been at it all day, and it doesn't look one bit better—at least, not a big bit.'

Suddenly she was interrupted by the reappearance of Jemima Jane—quite a different Jemima Jane—all resplendent with little bits of gorgeous apparel, which she had brought in her bag that morning to enable her to appear to advantage in Mrs. Tallmadge's 'conveyance,' when it conveyed her into the park or fashionable streets. Now she was in trouble, she came up to where Katherine and Barbara Linley were at work, stretched across the dresser between them without much ceremony, and eagerly examined several pans which were standing there, and then cried in a despairing voice:

'It's no use! It's not there! Oh, what shall I do?'

'What is the matter?' said they, not unkindly.

'Oh, it's something so bad—so distressing! Mrs. Tallmadge would hardly believe me when I told her what I had gone and

done. We had gone ever so far through the park before I found out. She would not really ; and I wish she was right—I do. It's partly the fault of you two young ladies—it really is, so you ought to trouble yourselves a little more to help me ; for if you hadn't quite upset me, I don't see how it could have happened.'

'We will help you,' said Katherine, 'if you will only say what has gone wrong.'

'It's my ring—my pearl ring ; and I've lost it. You see, when I saw how dirty the work was here, and how different from what I'd ever been accustomed to do, I took my ring off. I wasn't going to ruin it with sand and soap and such things, but I hadn't anywhere to put it, and just slipped it on the handle of a small pan that was standing in front of me, until I was ready to put it on again, and I forgot it ; and, oh Lor' ! how unpleasant it is ! I didn't want to tell every one about that ring, but I shall just have to tell, or no one will help me to look properly. It was my engaged ring. I am an engaged woman !' Here *Jemima Jane* broke down altogether, and wept.

'We will help you,' said Katherine and Barbara, in one breath. 'What was the ring like ? and what kind of a pan was it ?'

'The ring was pearls,—he said—no, I can't tell you what he said ; and, as for the pan, it was just like other pans, only with a handle small enough to let the ring go over it—a little black saucepan, enamelled inside.'

A vigorous search was made ; and at last, in the practice-kitchen, the pan and ring were found. Never was pan so graced before ! It had been used and thrust aside, and no one had seen the ring. Had it been observed, an aspirant after distinction might have devoted it to some reproduction of *Cleopatra's* delicacies of historic fame. Only, alas ! the pearls were not genuine. What did that signify, when to *Jemima Jane*, they were as dear as the most priceless of real ones could have been ? She wiped away her tears ; and, in her gratitude for their sympathy, shook hands with both Barbara and Katherine, who had quite won her heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

'We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep ;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day.'

SHELLEY.

KATHERINE awoke in a fright—a dream had startled her. A fortnight before, if any one had told her that her rest could be broken by anything so silly, she would have ridiculed the idea ; but by going to the School of Cookery, she had laid herself open to an entirely new class of troubles. Now her dreams were haunted by incidents which, though trifling to the last degree, had yet power to torment her. At one time she, the dauntless daughter of some state

prisoner, was hurrying to his dungeon with the pardon to obtain which she had moved heaven and earth. The door of the captive's cell was reached ; the gaoler stood dangling his keys while waiting to set him free ; but, when she sought in her pocket for the order of release, all that she could find was the tiny half-ounce weight which was always being mislaid in the kitchen at South Kensington ! At another, after painfully struggling through the process of making light puff-paste, and finding that she was about to achieve a success, she abandoned herself to delight thereat, and thus forgot to take her great work out of the oven, the consequence being that, when it did come out, it looked like something which Dr. Schliemann would have thought valuable. What awoke her so suddenly this morning was the sight of a lovely custard of her own creation, rising up in tumultuous revolt beneath her all-too-powerless spoon.

She sprang out of bed with something between a laugh and a deep-drawn sigh. It was a relief that nothing had really happened ; but it was almost pitiful to think that a heavy-hearted girl like herself could be the sport of such folly. How was it that she never dreamed of the sad things which filled her mind by day, when work left her a moment to think ? How many have asked themselves the same question ? Who can answer it ? Is it in cruelty or in kindness that nature never suffers the things which lie nearest to our hearts to form the subject of our dreams until time's effacing fingers have softened the impression they make on us ?

She dressed quickly—she had to do everything quickly now ; for at ten she must be in her place in the practice-kitchen, conning over the recipes by which she was to prepare the various dishes which formed the subject of that day's teaching. She liked the work, and she liked being so tired when she returned home, that little or nothing could be expected of her. As he could not see her during the day, Roger generally dined at No. 15. At this time fatigue, however, supplied her with an excellent excuse for any amount of shortcoming in conversation. She could not always talk. Roger was very good and kind, everyone was very good and kind, and she loved them all, and meant, if possible, to make them happy ; but she was anything but happy herself, and there were so many things she was afraid she would never forget. She tried to forget them. She could say with perfect honesty that she was loyally keeping her word to her father. She never allowed herself to think of Lewis Barrington—that is, never when she could help it. She could always prevent herself from trying to see him—from looking across the way at his house—from talking of him with Frank and Nancy Davenport ; and most honourably she abstained from these things. Never once did she enter the spare room from whence she could obtain a glimpse of him ; never once did she take out of the far corner of her desk the note she had received in answer to hers informing him that, by her father's desire, she was to see him no more.

His reply had been short, but it contained a vigorous and pathetic protest against this decision, and an assurance of affection which it cost her a mighty effort not to give herself the comfort of reading whenever life seemed to be treating her more harshly than she was able to endure. She resisted all such temptations. She had sworn to herself that she would do so, and she kept her word ; and so much self-denial from a girl who had never known what it was to practise that virtue, represented no small sacrifice to principle. The truth was, her sense of honour was deeply wounded by the bargain she had entered into with her father. Whether he was conscious of it or not, there was a painful amount of duplicity in keeping on this engagement for any other reason but a strong conviction that, in six months' time, she would, in all probability, be only too glad that she had not been allowed to break it off because of a passing caprice. It was such a pity—such a horrible pity and shame—that the interests of her family so imperatively demanded that she should keep on the same terms with Roger and the other Hackblocks until November and its business arrangements were over !

Katherine hated the thought of it, but there was no escaping this six months' delay or probation which her father had prescribed. All that she could do was to resolve that she would come out of it as stainlessly as possible. She listened most patiently to Roger's business conversations with her father ; she tried to enter into his schemes for the future. She really had a very great affection for him, and she tried to persuade herself that it was even greater than it was. Her father saw the change in her, and his face grew bright again. Mrs. Carey, too, was happy. Many a time she smoothed down her child's wavy hair, and said :

‘Kitty, I am very happy ! You think it is hard to die, but it's not so hard when you are easy about the future of those you love !’

Such speeches as these made Katherine struggle more and more to bring her wishes into unison with theirs. If she married Roger, she rounded the lives of those dear to her to perfection. The two families would love each other and live happily together. Barrington, on the contrary, was outside the pale altogether ; neither her father nor her mother would care for him. It might possibly be for her happiness to marry Mr. Barrington—supposing he ever asked her to do so, for she was not even sure he would do that—but her happiness would be the misery of everyone else. She sometimes thought she must end by marrying poor Roger, who loved her so, only pray Heaven that when she had done it, that other, of whom she must not think, might keep out of her way. If he approached her with his words and looks, which had such power over her, God pity and help her, for she feared it would be almost more than she could do to shut her heart to him—and yet it must be shut.

Work was the best thing for Katherine, and it was well for her

that she had it. To-day, as she dressed in such haste, with all these thoughts starting up in opposition to each other in her mind, she began to count up with regret the few remaining days of this work, which had done so much to distract her thoughts. In four days more her lessons would be over, and the school closed till late in autumn.

‘A note for you, Miss Katherine, and a parcel ; the boy is waiting for an answer,’ said a servant who suddenly opened the door.

‘And I have just been praying that he would keep away from me !’ thought Katherine, for instinctively she knew that this note was from Barrington.

The servant stood waiting in open-mouthed interest, for she saw that this was not a common note. Katherine opened the parcel first—it was the play ! He had finished it, and sent it to her.

‘You need not wait. I’ll ring when my answer is written,’ said she to the maid, for she was overcome by the sight of the manuscript, and afraid that she would be still more so by the note. This is what it contained :

‘In spite of what you said, I have called at your house since I received your letter. I asked for Mrs. Carey. I was told that Mrs. Carey had left a message that she was afraid that she would not be able to see me any more. Perhaps I ought not to have called, but I could not help it. Am I never to see you again ? I send the poor foolish bit of writing I have done for you ; will you not tell me if you like it ? Let me entreat you to come into the park to-morrow morning. I beg this most earnestly ; there is something I must say to you.’

It had been written the night before. Katherine’s heart leapt with desire to yield to this temptation ; it seemed to her that if she could but be with him once more, she would have nothing left to wish for ; but it must not be. How could she look in her father’s face again if she did this thing ? To get rid of a temptation which she dared not dally with, for fear of losing all power of resistance, she took her pen and wrote hastily :

‘Thank you very heartily for letting me read the play ; thank you also for writing it ; but as for what you ask, I cannot do it.’

She sent her note at once, and then she wiped away some tears of bitter disappointment. It was after ten when she took her place in the kitchen. Barbara Linley was making oyster-patties, minus the oysters, which were too expensive to be the subject of an experiment. Jemima Jane was busy with a lobster. Katherine had the other half of it given to her, together with the recipe for making cutlets of the same. All the other girls were in their places, and hard at work. She took the recipe, hoping that it was not like some others which she had had to contend with, which, though simple to inanity, were for that very reason more puzzling than tongue could tell.

'Help me to understand this,' said she to Barbara, for her own head was bewildered, and her thoughts busy with other things.

'Let me help you,' said Jemima Jane; 'I know all about it. Break up your lobster, just as I have done mine. Stop; just because I have left my place for a minute to speak to you, that meddling girl is off with my head! I'll not have it! That's my head, and not yours! It's only five minutes ago since you tried to carry off my best claw! How pale you look, Miss Carey, and me too, don't I? One oughtn't to go into society when one is working in this way! I felt quite queer last night when I was dressed up prettily for visiting, me that had been standing all day on a floor strewn over with sawdust. I kept hoping all the time that none of the great folks there knew what poor little Jemima Jane had been doing all day!'

Katherine worked mechanically, hardly hearing what anyone said, but somehow conscious that her friend Barbara was pitying her, and that poor Jemima Jane, vulgar though she was, meant to be kind. 'I suppose,' whispered the latter, 'you are in love, as I am, and that makes you look so dreadfully unhappy and queer. How one does get one's self put out at such critical times! Such little silly things do vex one! Keep up your heart. You are perhaps thinking him unkind about something or other, but depend upon it, he doesn't mean it.'

'It's not that,' said Katherine indignantly. 'It's nothing of that kind, I assure you!'

'Oh yes, it is. Don't I know what being in love looks like, and so I ought, too, when I am an engaged woman! Well, we won't talk about it, if you have a delicacy. I had a delicacy myself at first, and can understand. Come, and I'll show you how to pound that lobster. Did you ever see such a pestle in your life! it's ten feet long! Take a look round; we are a busy lot, aren't we?'

Katherine thought almost every word that Jemima Jane said odious, but was too much cast down by her grief at what had happened to be able to do anything but quietly obey. She did obey, and looked round when bidden to do so. Bright, happy-looking girls were working as they had never worked before. Some were whipping creams, or decorating moulds, others beating whites of eggs up to pyramids of flaky froth, or fighting a hard battle with Genoese pastry. 'Look at my meringues!' said one, holding up a trayful in triumph.

'What a shame they don't let me have oysters to put in my patties!' lamented Barbara. 'It's not truth in production, as my cousin Coventry would say.'

'What can that be?' exclaimed Jemima Jane, not unnaturally; and then she added, 'But how crooked your patties are, and how tall!' So they were. Barbara had made her pastry so light, that, as Browning says of virtue in a particular case, it had toppled over

to the other side and become a vice; her patties were like so many leaning towers of Pisa. Jemima Jane flung questions about at random, and never waited to have them answered; she administered rebukes also, and never so much as looked to see how they were taken. She was busy, and did not care. 'We must have a *liaison* of some kind,' said one girl, in her hearing. Jemima Jane did not know it was a well-known culinary term, and was down on her in a moment for her questionable language. Another girl spoke of 'greasing a dish,' and was reproved for not saying 'buttering a mould.'

In the afternoon, strangers are admitted, and the handsome lady-superintendent conducts them through the building, explaining all they see. They pass quickly through the kitchens, and most of the girls are much too busy to be aware of their presence. Katherine was at the end of one of the tables and engaged in the difficult task of moulding a certain portion of boiled fish and mashed potatoes into the form of a well-grown, handsome haddock. She had got so far that she was tracing scales on his back to complete the resemblance, when Jemima Jane exclaimed:

'Oh, Lor'! how disagreeable it is when gentlemen will stare you out of countenance! I am sure that young man need not trouble himself to go on staring that way at me, for I am an engaged woman, and it is a very great pity that he doesn't know it, and then he could save himself the trouble!'

Katherine looked up and saw Lewis Barrington standing at some distance from her with the superintendent, who was explaining, as she believed, all the arrangements of the place to a gentleman intimately connected with the public press, and certain to use the knowledge she was giving him in some brilliant and beneficial article. Barrington of course had come to see Katherine, and it was at her that he was looking, and not at her vain companion. Katherine turned and let fall the knife with which she was making the curved lines of her haddock's scales.

Barrington ran forward to pick it up, their hands met, their eyes met, and while stooping, he said in a low voice, 'How can you treat me so hardly? Let me see you. Let me speak to you this afternoon on your way home.' No one heard what he said.

Katherine murmured a faint 'No, no,' and thanked him just as she might have thanked a stranger; more she dared not do.

'And then, you see, Mr. Barrington,' said the lady-superintendent, 'this is not the only kitchen; there is another very good one through that door; the ovens are there, and the teachers go from one to the other; you would——' but the rest of that speech was lost by their passing through the door.

'Lor'! said Jemima Jane, 'I do believe that young man is quite smitten with me! Didn't he look like it, Miss Carey? I am sure I never expected to make a conquest in this queer place, and me

dressed like this, just nohow. Well, he needn't trouble to fall in love with me, for he'll not get me, for I am bespoke.'

'Somebody ought really to have the charity to tell him you are engaged,' said Barbara, laughing, but just then the teacher came, and they had to be silent for a minute or two. Jemima Jane, however, began to pull up her brown-holland sleeves and give other touches to her dress.

'You needn't do that,' said Barbara; 'they won't come back this way; they will go out by the artisan's kitchen.'

'That's all you know! I am quite certain that he will persuade her to bring him back through our kitchen. He was quite took, I am certain.'

She was right. They did come back, and Barrington tried to make his companion spend a minute or two by Katherine's table.

'I see you don't despise a *réchauffé*,' said he, looking at Katherine's haddock.

'Oh, we teach a little of everything,' said the lady, and glided on.

He lingered, hoping to obtain one look from Katherine. At last she could not help raising her eyes to his. His seemed to entreat her to grant his request, but all that he could see in hers was the deepest sadness.

'Nice young man, that!' said Jemima Jane. 'I wonder what has brought him here, though. He can't care about a place like this. Has he seen some of us coming in, and taken a fancy to us? Wouldn't it be funny if that was it? I'll bet you a great deal that's just what it really is.'

She was longing to be teased about him, but no one spoke—neither Barbara nor Katherine chose to take a part in such conversation; but Jemima Jane did not resent their silence. Poor girls! they were mortified at her receiving so much more notice than they did.

'Barbara,' whispered Katherine, for by this time they were very friendly, 'how are you going home?'

'Aunt is going to send the carriage for me to-day,' was the answer.

Both Barbara and Katherine usually employed the porter to get cabs for them, but to-day the latter was afraid to go home alone, and as Barbara was staying at an hotel in Jermyn Street, thought they might go together.

'Take me with you,' said she in a whisper. 'I have a reason for wishing not to be alone. I wish you would be so kind as to take me home.'

'Of course I will, with the greatest of pleasure,' said Barbara; and then poor Katherine, divided between her strong wishes and her duty, could have cried her eyes out at having deprived herself of the bliss of a few minutes' walk with Barrington, who would, she felt sure, be waiting for her in Exhibition Road. 'However wrongly I may be acting,' thought she, 'it is not altogether my fault.'

If Roger were away there would be no harm in loving Mr. Barrington, and I am trying to do my very best to behave well ! Three or four days of July, and then all August, September, October, November, and December must pass, and after that, if I don't love Roger I shall be free to say so ; but how can I love him if Mr. Barrington begins to follow me about as he is doing now ? It is very cruel of him !

'Won't it be odd if I meet that nice-looking man somewhere on my way home ?' said Jemima Jane, as she gave a becoming twist to a rosebud in her bonnet. 'It will be very rude and disagreeable if he tries to find out where I live by watching me ; but I'll just show him that I'm above such goings-on, and walk past in a really dignified way. Even Mrs. Tallmadge can't help owning that no one can come up to me for dignity when once I begin.'

'I wish you would begin then,' said Barbara impatiently, for she saw that Katherine was unhappy, and was afraid that Jemima Jane worried her.

Jemima Jane turned round, and fixed an angry little eye on Barbara, while saying :

'Leave my dignity to me to manage. I know best when to put it on, and when not ! Good-bye, dear Miss Carey ; lie down a while when you get in. I always lie down myself when I feel all-overish, and that's how you are feeling, I fancy. Good-bye, dear !'

Strange to say, Katherine felt soothed even by such uncouth sympathy as this. Tears started to her eyes at the least word of kindness, she needed it so much, and yet had to conceal all that gave her a claim to it. She put her hand in Barbara's, and together they went through the garden to the carriage, and the moment the door was shut on them, she threw herself back and looked at the blue cushions opposite and at nothing else. She felt that Lewis Barrington was somewhere in the neighbourhood—why should she give herself the pain of seeing him, when to see him was only to pass him coldly by ?

'Oh, look, Katherine !' said Barbara. 'I do believe that dreadful Jemima Jane is right, and that that gentleman really has taken a fancy to her ! He can't be much of a gentleman, can he ? Let us see what she does when she finds out that he is there. They'll meet in a minute. Let us both look back.'

'I don't want to see,' murmured Katherine ; 'my head aches.'

'I was afraid it did. Oh, he has never so much as looked at her. He can't have wanted to see her pretty face again. He must live somewhere near. Well, she walked past him without looking either, just as a lady would have done. I shouldn't have given her credit for it ; but we shall hear quite a romantic story to-morrow—that's certain !'

Katherine felt as if she didn't want to go to the school to-morrow. If Mr. Barrington had found out that she went there daily, he

might make another attempt to see her. It was so hard to have to deny herself that pleasure, and how hard, too, it would be to have to stay at home and lose the distraction of her cooking lessons. She began to wish that she could leave London for a time. If she could go away and stay until these painful five months which lay before her were over, life would be more bearable. The more she thought of it, the more the idea pleased her; but how could she go away? It was impossible to leave her mother. Barbara found her unusually silent, but had a firm belief in her headache.

'Good-bye till to-morrow, dear,' said she, and Katherine said the same.

She went to her own room to wash away all trace of tears before going to her mother, but when she opened her bedroom door, a sight met her eyes for which she was totally unprepared. She saw her own travelling-boxes standing, one half filled with neatly folded dresses, the other packed, covered, corded, and directed. She stooped to read the direction, and saw: 'Miss Carey, Lockhart's Hotel, Princes Street, Edinburgh.' She rang for her maid at once, and inquired what this meant.

'It is all right, miss,' said Pritchard meekly; she was well accustomed to what she called Miss Katherine's tantrums. 'Don't be angry with me; I've done nothing but obey orders. Mrs. Hackblock came about one o'clock to say that Dr. Andrew Clarke had ordered her to try mountain air, so she was going to start for Scotland next day, and wanted you to go with her; and Mrs. Carey, miss, she kind of jumped at the notion, for she has been troubling herself a long time, without expressing her trouble to you, because you looked out of health.'

'But you don't mean that I am really to go? Is it fixed?' said Katherine, who, now that her wish was so suddenly granted, and she was going to be taken away from London, hated the idea of leaving home.

'Yes, miss, you are to go. Mr. Hackblock and master settled it first in the City, and then Mrs. Hackblock came here; and, Miss Katherine, it's really better for you, for with poor mistress as she is, she can't be moved into the country this year, and you see in that way you would get no manner of change at all.'

'Is no one else going? Mr. Hackblock and Mr. Roger, I mean?'

'Yes, Mr. Hackblock is, but not Mr. Roger; at least, not the whole time. That's what mistress told me.'

'And you, Pritchard? Am I not to have you with me?'

'They seem to think that I had better stay at home,' said Pritchard grimly, for she wanted to go.

Katherine ran to her mother's room.

'Your father wishes it,' said Mrs. Carey. 'He says he is certain that it will be better for you.'

Katherine bowed her head—perhaps her poor mother spoke pro-

phetically—and she resigned herself. Certainly, if many such trials as that which she had just surmounted lay before her, it was better that she should be taken from them. She scarcely knew what she herself wished; possibly the desire to be taken out of temptation was her strongest feeling. She went to her room, threw herself down on the floor, and watered her box with tears. She was to go early in the morning, but did not know when she was to return. She knew that she could stay at home if she expressed a great wish to do so; but she dared not do that, for never in her life had she felt so weak as she had felt an hour or two ago, when it had behoved her to be so strong. About seven o'clock she crept into the spare room, and looked across at Barrington's house. As she was going away for so long, she thought she might allow herself that one empty joy. It was not altogether an empty joy. Barrington was standing at his window, gazing vacantly at the walls which hid her from his sight. Both were too sad to remember trifles; they were standing in front of their sheltering curtains, and saw each other. He clasped his hands as if in entreaty; she sadly shook her head, and crept away. 2

CHAPTER XXII.

'We think caged birds sing, when indeed they cry.'

VITTORIA COROMBONA.

AUGUST and September had come to an end, and October was beginning, yet Katherine was still in Scotland with the Hackblocks. She was not unhappy. They were kindness itself, and it was such a relief to be taken away from a house which stood so near that other house at which she was bound in honour not to look, and a still greater relief to be safe from notes from Mr. Barrington, and all chance of meeting him. She thought she had driven him out of her mind—to her, her heart seemed dead. She lived from day to day, doing what the others did, and feeling so tired when she went to bed that she fell asleep at once. Roger had been backwards and forwards for a week or two at a time. They had sailed on lakes together, and ascended mountains, and in one way or another had seen most of the finest scenery in the country. Everything was delightfully new to Katherine, whose knowledge of Scotland was restricted to what could be gained during the course of easy drives near her father's house. Now she had companions in full health, of abundant kindness, and rich enough to deny themselves nothing. Roger had never been so gentle and good to her before. He knew something which she did not, and pitied her as we pity one about to undergo a great misfortune of which he is entirely ignorant. This made him much more tender and delicately respectful to her than it was otherwise in his nature to be. He who came and went had repeatedly seen the Careys during the time that Katherine had

been away from them, and knew that Mrs. Carey was considered by her doctors to be in much worse health than in the summer, and certain not to see the beginning of a new year. She was the one who had insisted on this being concealed from Katherine a little longer. Katherine was well and happy—let her remain so ; trouble would come soon enough. Roger saw that she seemed out of spirits, and supposed it was on her mother's account. What would she feel if she did but know the truth ? Whenever he was able to be with them, he made it his business to fill her days so full of hard but pleasurable sight-seeing, that she had no time to dwell on home-troubles. She was sensible of his kindness, and gentle and kind too, though often very silent ; but Roger was not one who cared for much conversation, except with business men and on business matters. So long as she looked handsome, and smiled when she saw him, and showed interest when he spoke, that was about as much as he demanded of her. She avoided being left alone with him, but he did not observe that, for there were very few opportunities for solitary walks or talks, as Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock were quite as active as the young folks, and always accompanied them.

Mrs. Hackblock was still fond of statistics, but in a different way. For the present it was a matter of complete indifference to her what things cost—they might be cheap or dear as they liked, only she much preferred them to be dear, for in that case she had the comfort of thinking that her natural enemies, the hotel-keepers, were getting less out of her than they would have wished. She had given up teaching Katherine, and all her housekeeping maxims and monitions were left at home. This was because she herself was acting in obedience to one of them, and that a very salutary one, viz., when you go away for your holiday don't take your work with you. They had been spending a week at a lovely place on Lock Etive, and now they were driving Roger to the station, for his visit had come to an end. They were to follow him in less than a month. It was, however, doubtful whether he would be able to come North again. Mrs. Hackblock was urging him to do so.

'Tell him, Katherine,' said she—'you can persuade him better than I can—tell him he must make time to come back to us for a week or so at the last. We have all been very happy here.'

'We really have !' said Katherine. 'Most happy ! Everything is so beautiful ; and it is a pleasure even to breathe the air. It would do you good, Roger ; you will come back in a week or so if you can, won't you ?'

'You may rely on that, Kitty dear ; but it's too bad to throw all the work on your father. If I go away, he is the only one of us at home.'

'But I know he won't go away unless mother does ; and you said he looked well and happy.'

'I said he looked well,' began Roger, wondering how to end that speech ; for, indeed, Mr. Carey was not looking happy.

He gazed affectionately in Katherine's beautiful but anxious face, and said :

'I'll go and see him as soon as I get back, and then I'll tell you exactly how he is looking ;' and yet he knew that Mrs. Carey would not suffer him to do that.

As soon as Roger's train was gone, they crossed the lake to an hotel on the other side of it. They had seen it on one of their excursions, and had taken a great fancy to its appearance. Its walls were white-washed, and covered with roses ; its garden sloped down to the water, and was full of flowers ; and in the centre of the lawn was a brilliant fountain, in which was imprisoned a crimson ball, which was thrown up in every jet of water, and then fell back, and was thrown again.

This pleased Mr. Hackblock mightily. He said he could sit and watch it all day : it made him feel so deliciously busy, and yet so agreeably idle. Everything pleased Mr. Hackblock. It was a delight to him to have an under-cooked egg given him for breakfast ; he enjoyed the thought that, if he sent it away to be boiled a little longer, the loss of time was of no consequence. He was in no hurry about anything ; he could even sit and eat shrimps and prawns at breakfast ; leisurely peel his walnuts at dinner, and do just as he chose, whereas in London it was as much as a servant's place was worth to keep him waiting five minutes. His happiness did not make him look happier ; he still looked a grim cadaverous man, who would seem more at his place at a funeral, or presiding at a coroner's inquest, than anywhere else. Dinner was to be at seven, and in the Hackblocks' own room.

Katherine reluctantly left the garden, where she had been watching a most magnificent sunset, and went upstairs to dress. It was still so beautiful that it seemed quite a pity to go into the house. A broad bar of deep amber, lying low on the horizon, was nearly all that was now left ; and it, too, was rapidly growing dusky with the coming night. Above it were tracts of wonderful lightness and delicacy—greens that faded into blues, and blues that melted away into lilacs—with filmy little cloud-islands here and there ; but all so ethereal and transitory, that to see them was only to lose them.

Katherine had pushed her dressing-table aside to see as much as she could from her window ; as she put it back again, her hand brushed against a folded paper lying near the looking-glass. It was a scrap torn from an hotel-bill, and a few words were scribbled on it with a blunt-pointed pencil very hurriedly and illegibly.

'Be on your guard during dinner ; and, if anything surprises you, do not seem startled, or speak.'

She examined the writing, and for one instant her heart stood still, for something about the way the letters were formed reminded her of Barrington's; but the resemblance was so slight, and the chance of its being from him so infinitesimally small, that she dismissed the idea as absurd. Indeed, before many minutes had passed, she had ceased to think about the matter at all. What was likely to happen that could be of any consequence to her? No doubt the paper had been left by the last occupant of the room. She went and took her place at the dinner-table, and never had she looked better than she did now—in a black lace dress, with some magnificent clove carnations, which she had found in the garden.

'Katherine dear, how nice you look! and how well those red flowers suit you!' said Mrs. Hackblock, pinching her thin lips together in austere enjoyment of this visual delight. 'There is one good thing about Scotland—and that is, you get your sunsets later in the day, and your fruit and flowers later in the year, than you do anywhere else. Those carnations look quite regal! I do like beautiful colour!' she added, with her cold eyes still fixed on the flowers, and her lips parted in a wintry smile.

Mrs. Hackblock always said that she liked bright colours, and always wore subdued ones. Not only did she choose *teints dégradés*, but she picked out the most degraded of them. She liked what she called a cool, slaty-grey for herself, or a dull blue-black, which suggested nothing more beautiful than an ink-stain. To-night she wore a sad-coloured brown silk, which rustled angrily when she moved. She had, as she thought, rendered it harmonious by wearing aqua-marine ornaments, which made her pale face look still paler, and her thin lips more colourless. She smoothed the folds of her dress, and sat rigidly upright in her place opposite to her husband, and with her back to the fine view of the lake, the solemn-looking mountains, and the last vestige of dusky orange in the sky. She did not feel the least wish to change her place—mountains to her were not much more than irregular bits of land, which would not lie flat as they ought; but did some good, nevertheless, by affording shelter to sheep, deer, game, and other things which help good housekeepers to vary their *ménu*. She had looked at these mountains most of the day—that was enough. Her first words were:

'Well, my dear Nathaniel, have you anything amusing to tell us?'

Mr. Hackblock have anything amusing to tell them! Katherine looked up in amazement. If he had—he who was always so grave and taciturn—that of itself would be a surprise quite great enough to warrant the display of caution recommended by the secret correspondent. But Mr. Hackblock said calmly:

'I have got nothing to tell you, except that I am extremely hungry.'

Presently he poured out a glass of claret, and tasted it, but it did not please him.

'Waiter,' said he. 'That's not what I ordered ; you surely don't call that a light claret ? At any rate, if you do, I don't !'

'I'll see if we have anything lighter,' said the man humbly. In another minute he returned to say how sorry he was, but all the claret they had was 'just as dark-coloured as that.'

Mr. Hackblock laughed ; Mrs. Hackblock said it was surprising ! Even Katherine was about to utter an exclamation of astonishment, when she remembered the warning contained in the paper she had found, and refrained. Was this the incident which, though surprising and startling, she was bidden to take calmly ? Impossible ; but it served to put her on her guard.

She was not in a very observant state of mind, but when the fish was removed and some other dish put on the table, she did just remark that the waiter who took her plate away had a very shapely hand, and then she heard Mrs. Hackblock, who had a way of treating servants as if they were animated machinery, exclaim, 'Oh, I am glad that they have sent another man to help to wait on us ! We shall get on better now. It was terribly slow work with one.'

Katherine did not care how long or how short a time the dinner lasted. When it was over she would only have to be beaten at chess by Mr. Hackblock ; but by way of taking a civil interest in what was being said, she looked up and saw Lewis Barrington offering Mr. Hackblock some potatoes. She was so overwhelmed by this sudden surprise that she dropped the wine-glass she was raising to her lips, and this served to account for the exclamation of astonishment which she could not restrain. She hastily stooped to pick it up, only too glad of such an excuse for hiding her face for a moment. Barrington ran to help her, and actually, in the very presence of the enemy, grasped the hand which she had stretched out under the table to find the glass, and kissed it. It was done in a moment ; the next instant he rose up, glass in hand, in the sight of all. Katherine did not recover herself so quickly. Her cheeks burned ; her hands trembled with nervousness.

'My dear, why do you distress yourself about a shabby little wine-glass ?' said Mrs. Hackblock. 'It is nothing of a glass ! I noticed them all when we first sat down. They do very well to drink out of, but are as common as common ! Sixpence would replace it, even if you had broken it. It is such a pity that you have made yourself so nervous about nothing. Those poor cheeks won't come back to their own colour to-night !'

'Why, it *has* given you a fright !' said Mr. Hackblock, sympathetically. 'You are trembling all over ! Take another glass of wine.'

Barrington filled another glass for her. Katherine hardly dared to breathe when he once more stood by her side ; assuredly she dared not look up. To hide her burning cheeks, she bent her

head down over her plate. There was a short silence, after which Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock began as usual to congratulate themselves gleefully on their quarters. 'Nice, comfortable little place this is,' said he. 'It quite pleases me! All is so quiet and home-like.'

'Very! We see and hear nothing of any other tourists. I should imagine that one might live here month after month without ever feeling one emotion; at least that's my idea of the place,' said Mrs. Hackblock. 'Now at home there are always little worries and excitements, but here there's nothing to stir one—nothing at all; now is there, Katherine?'

'The scenery is very exciting,' said Katherine, faintly.

'The scenery! How can scenery be exciting?' inquired Mr. Hackblock.

'Don't ask me, for I can't answer you,' said his wife. 'No, there's nothing exciting here, but that's what makes it so delightful.'

'Yes. This settled calm is most healthful,' continued her husband.

'Very, Nathaniel, very. It's what we pay for, and everything really is peaceful. We did feel a little emotion this morning, though, when our dear Roger went away and left us. Didn't we, Katherine? I wish for your sake he could have stayed a little longer, but we shall soon see him again.'

'Very soon,' said Katherine, whose cheeks were still crimson.

'He thought you looked much better for the change, and so you do, and so we all do.'

'What does you so much good, Mrs. Hackblock, my dear,' said her husband, with fatal perspicacity, 'is to get away from all the botheration of your housekeeping! I think you take far too much trouble about your hens and chickens, and apples, and candle-ends, and such-like twopenny-halfpenny matters. After all, one can but be happy here below, and when you have money enough to allow a little waste without losing any of the comforts necessary to existence, I don't see why you should torment yourself and other people by taking so much notice of trifles.'

'Nathaniel! My dear husband! I really do think!' ejaculated Mrs. Hackblock, with eyes upturned in horror and dismay, for in a moment of confidential ease Mr. Hackblock was at one fell swoop subverting all her teaching! She could not trust herself to say more.

'You think what?' inquired Mr. Hackblock, who either did not know how much he was offending her, or did not choose to take a hint.

'I think that, after all the pains that I have taken to drill dear Katherine into being a careful and economical wife to our son Roger, you need not talk in such a very indiscriminate and incon-

sistent way ! You will destroy all respect for me and my opinions. Katherine won't know what to think next time I give her good advice.' And the aggrieved lady turned away from a tempting dish Barrington was just offering her, being unable now to derive any pleasure from partaking of it.

'Oh yes, I shall,' said Katherine, pitying her, and anxious to put an end to a conversation which it was gall and wormwood to her that Barrington should hear, and then she trembling looked at him. He seemed to be thinking of her, and of her only, and how his sudden appearance had startled her. His eyes were fixed on her in the greatest concern.

'Come, don't stand there doing nothing !' said Mr. Hackblock to him. 'Can't you hand those peas ? You might as well be out of the room as in it if you do nothing !'

Katherine blushed to hear him whom she venerated so profoundly spoken to more roughly than she herself would have spoken to a strange dog ; but she consoled herself, for Mr. Hackblock had looked fixedly at the *soidisant* waiter while he spoke, and had evidently not recognised him. Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock had twice been in Barrington's company, once at that memorable first party and afterwards at the haymaking fête. He had, however, made no impression on them on either occasion. Hearing himself addressed in this brusque manner, Barrington started, and began to do his work better than any waiter had ever done before. He gave himself up to no more fits of musing, and Mr. Hackblock exchanged a look with his wife expressive of admiration of his own power of dealing with such people. Barrington's alertness had, however, its bad side, for now Katherine felt that he must be hearing the conversation, and its tone was not elevated. It expressed smug middle-class contentment, unilluminated by any aspiration for anything higher. Both Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock were entirely unaware that there was anything higher. Their highest aim was to pass through the world unnoticed except for unvarying respectability. Their highest hope was never to be worse off than they were now. The only great work which lay before them to do was to set Roger well a-going in the same lines of life which their own feet had trod, and when that was done, and when little Hackblocks were springing up, whom Roger in his turn would train as he himself had been trained, their work in life would be over, everything would be done, and done well, and they might end their days in peace. All their thoughts, aims, and hopes, were so plainly mapped out in their conversation, and all were so contentedly low and dull, that Katherine found herself shuddering at the part she herself was expected to play in the scheme of their existence, and ready to sink into the earth with shame at everything being thus unfolded to him whose good opinion was to her so precious. Humbly and timidly she ventured to look in his face, fearing to see her condemnation in it. She forgot

her fear in a moment—that one look convinced her he loved her still, and that nothing said by those people could change him.

‘You are very silent, Kitty dear!’ said Mrs. Hackblock, who only cared for three people in the world, and Kitty was one of them.

‘I am afraid I am,’ replied Katherine, but she could not make herself speak. She was in a whirl of suppressed delight at Barrington’s presence, but at the same time so terribly nervous that she was afraid to trust her voice.

After dinner she played three games at chess. Mr. Hackblock, of course, won them, and then went into the garden ‘to see what the night was like.’ They could watch his tall figure walking backwards and forwards for half an hour. Mrs. Hackblock was knitting a drab-coloured shawl, Katherine sitting with a book in her hand by the fire. Mrs. Hackblock could see that she never turned a page, and said kindly :

‘I am afraid you miss Roger. I wish we could have insisted on his staying with us.’

‘Miss Roger! Why, of course she does!’ exclaimed Mr. Hackblock, coming in at that moment with a great deal of fresh outside air playing about him. ‘Ar’n’t they lovers, and ar’n’t lovers expected to miss each other?’

‘Yes, yes, I know that, but Kitty is a dear, affectionate girl.’

Katherine’s eyes filled with tears of shame and regret. She was unworthy of their great kindness. She presumed to despise them; how dared she do so? They were at any rate honest and straightforward; what was she? She burned to tell them the truth. She would never feel as if she had a right to hold up her head until she had done so.

‘I don’t deserve your kindness,’ said she hurriedly, and they could see large tears floating in her eyes, as she spoke. ‘I am not half so good as you think me! You don’t know how wicked I am!’ and she burst into a passion of tears.

‘My dear Katherine!’ said Mr. Hackblock soothingly

‘My poor darling!’ said Mrs. Hackblock; ‘go to bed. You are overtired—over-wrought altogether; go to bed; give me a kiss, and go.’

‘Are *you* coming up?’ asked Katherine, casting one longing look at Mrs. Hackblock, and wondering, if she received an answer in the affirmative, whether she would have courage to obey an impulse she was now feeling to throw her weakness on another person’s strength, and tell enough of the truth to obtain protection.

Mrs. Hackblock almost divined that Katherine wanted her specially, but her own nature was so cold that, fond as she was of the girl, she could not bring herself to search into fanciful distresses, which she attributed to over-fatigue and regret at parting with Roger. Mrs. Hackblock had the greatest horror of any excitement of mind or manner, and therefore hurried Katherine off without

following to inquire further into what was troubling her so much. Had she gone with her, and said one really loving word, she would certainly have heard enough to enable her to save the unhappy girl, now in her charge, from all present danger.

Divided between regret at losing this opportunity of opening some part of her mind to Mrs. Hackblock and relief at escaping the great difficulty which that would entail, Katherine slowly retreated, sick at heart at having to practise such deception ; for, however she might deceive herself when away from him, the moment she saw Lewis Barrington she was perfectly aware whom she loved.

Mrs. Hackblock felt a little uncomfortable about not having shown more sympathy.

‘Perhaps I ought to have gone upstairs with her, Nathaniel. I am sure she wanted me to go,’ said she. ‘If I had, it might have been a comfort to the poor child, and she could have told me what was really the matter.’

But Mrs. Hackblock did not like tears or trying scenes, and was quite sure that Katherine would be all right next day. Katherine went to her room and sat down by her window, wondering what she ought to do. She thought she had better throw herself on Barrington’s mercy, and entreat him to go away. But how was she to convey a letter to him? He ought not to have done such a wrong thing. He must have bribed the people of the inn, or at all events the waiter. She could not bribe them ; what was she to do? She sat by the window for some time. Shafts of light streamed from it and from other windows into the garden, but one by one these were extinguished. Everyone was going to bed but herself—she did not feel as if she could sleep, or inclined to try to do so. She heard a rustling noise—a noise like paper being pushed under her door—and saw something white lying just inside her room. He was there ! That was her instantaneous thought, but he dared not knock or speak. It was well that he was cautious, for the Hackblocks’ rooms were on the same landing. Very gently she stole across the room, afraid of the sound of her own footsteps. The paper was folded, and only contained two or three lines :

‘You will, I am sure, not refuse to see me when I have travelled so far on purpose to see you. It would be most cruel. It is now half-past eleven ; by half-past twelve or soon after, every one in the hotel will be asleep. Don’t come if you hear any one stirring, but if all is quiet, I entreat you to come downstairs to your own sitting-room, where you will find me. I will keep up a good fire, and we can talk for a while in perfect safety. You see that I depend on your kindness, and know that you will come. If I can but see you for twenty minutes, I shall be for ever grateful to you. What miserable months these have been !’

‘Shall I go?’ said Katherine eagerly to herself. ‘But my promise!—oh, I must keep my promise! No, I cannot go! I

said I would see him no more, and I must keep to it—I will keep to it—I will not see him !’ She flung herself on her bed to lament her disappointment. She was resolved to be firm. Alas ! just as the clock struck one, she softly opened her door, and hearing nothing but the beating of her own heart, she slowly and silently went downstairs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

‘ *N’est-ce pas qu’il est doux
D’aimer et de savoir qu’on vous aime à genoux !
D’être deux ? d’être seuls ? et que c’est douce chose
De se parler d’amour la nuit quand tout repose.*’

VICTOR HUGO.

SCARCELY had Katherine’s faint and frightened fingers touched the handle of the sitting-room door than it opened, and she felt herself drawn into the room by a firm, but loving hand.

‘ I know I ought not to have come,’ said she ; ‘ I did my very best to be good and stay away, but I had such a wish to see you again !’

‘ Hush !’ said he, gently leading her in, and then shutting the door ; ‘ don’t speak till we are inside. How could you think of refusing to see me ? You know I love you—you must know that—you must feel that my love is worth a thousand times more than the love of that man to whom you will go on trying so hard to be constant ! Come in. Sit down there, and let me have this one chance of speaking to you. I have gone through a great deal to secure it ! Come.’

He half put his arm round her to lead her to a chair by the fire. The fire was warm and bright, and the whole room looked mellow with the light it gave. Katherine was cold and chill with her long vigil upstairs, and her heart, after so many weary weeks with the Hackblocks, was just as cold and comfortless. She could have wept with joy at this sudden transition from empty desolation to the fulness of happiness, but she restrained herself. Nevertheless, until this moment, she had never realized how much the separation from Barrington had cost her.

‘ My dear Katherine !’ said he, looking at her with eyes full of passionate love. Hers fell before them. She dared not meet his gaze, for she knew that she must conceal what she felt—for her oath’s sake and her father’s, she must if possible deny her love. It was hard to have to do it when he was there, and she loved him so dearly. It was almost impossible to do so if she remained where she was, subject to the fascination and bewilderment of his presence. She must leave him if she wished to hide her love from him ; but how hard it was to go ! She granted herself a brief respite, and sat for a while in happy silence. She was resolved to return to her own room in a few minutes, but could not put an end to her delight until she had enjoyed it a very little longer. So far she had said

nothing—done nothing wrong ; her only crime had been in indulging herself with this sight of him. But he could not take things so quietly ; in another moment he was at her feet, had seized her hands, and covered them with kisses, and was saying, ‘Katherine, dearest, do not be ungenerous. Own you love me just a little.’

Katherine tore her hands from his, and rose to her feet to fly from a temptation which was rapidly becoming too strong for her, but he held her back, and said :

‘Dear Katherine, be true to yourself and to me. If you do love me, why not give me the happiness of hearing you say so !’

The sound of his voice melted her at once, and she answered :

‘I do—I do most truly ; but there are so many reasons why I must not say so.’

‘What reasons ?’ he asked impetuously. ‘Why should you not say so if it is the truth ?’

‘Oh, I cannot—must not tell you ! Let me go ; I ought not to have come here.’

‘One minute more,’ said he ; ‘stay one minute, and I’ll let you go. I want you to tell me if these reasons will hold good for ever. You don’t mean that, do you ?’

‘Oh no, not for ever.’

‘For how long ?’

‘I don’t know ; for some months.’

‘And then you will own you love me ?’

‘Yes.’

‘And let me ask your father to give you to me ?’

‘If you think me worth having.’

‘But if you are willing to do this then, why not do it now ? Is it right to continue to be engaged to Mr. Hackblock now, when you intend to break off with him in a month or two ?’

Ah, even he put his finger at once on that black spot in her conduct !

‘Of course it is not right, but it is not my fault. I wanted to break off with him in June, but my father would not let me. He was sure I did not know my own mind, and insisted on my making a great effort to like him better. Don’t despise me for yielding—I was forced. I have not been playing a treacherous part—I give you my word of honour that I have not—ever since June, when I was made to promise to keep on my engagement to him for six months longer, I have been doing my very best to care for him, and him only.’

‘You tell me this as if you thought it was likely to please me. I don’t want you either to love him or to try to love him. I should think not, indeed. Katherine, you must love me, and me only.’

Katherine shook her head ; then she seemed to put away his professions of love, and answered :

‘But you surely must prefer to think of me as a girl who has

some idea of honour? You know that I wrote to say I must see you no more—that you must not write to me; you must know that I have tried to be true to him: so if I have behaved ill by keeping on my engagement till now, it's not my fault, for I was only obeying orders, and I really have tried to love him.'

'And have you succeeded, Katherine?' said he, though he knew that she had not. 'What is your feeling for him? Tell me with perfect truth and honesty.'

'I will—at least, I will try. It is very difficult to explain, because I have known him ever since I was a child. I can't judge him as I would a new friend; he has shared almost every pleasure of my life, been mixed up in all my troubles, and was always there to take the blame on himself, to screen me when I had done anything wrong. Then his father and mother have been such intimate friends of ours, that they are like second parents to me. Roger is like one of our own family, and that of itself seems to make us belong to each other. You must understand that I love Roger very much, but I am not in love with him.'

'In other words, you would have been quite content to marry him, if you had not found out what love was?'

'That is true—quite true; and it is such a pity that things have not stayed as they were,' said Katherine sadly.

'But now?' he said. 'Katherine dear, are you willing to marry him now?'

'I don't know. Don't ask me. My father will be heart-broken if I don't; and I have so much regard for Roger, that sometimes I have thought I could marry him and be almost happy—if you would but make me one promise—if you would promise to keep entirely away from me!'

'Dismiss that idea for ever! You could no more be happy with him than I could keep away from you. You might extract that promise from me, but I should break it—I should infallibly break it! You are mine, and mine only; and come what will, I intend to have you.'

Katherine half trembled; then a great sense of relief came over her. She was so glad that the responsibility of decision was taken from her; and, besides that, she did love him so dearly. He was sitting on the floor at her feet, with both her hands in his. By the warm firelight he could see her full deep eyes bent on him with arrears of repressed love in them.

'It is such a long, long time since I have seen you,' said he; 'it has been so sad to look across the street at your poor deserted house, and wonder where you were.'

'How did you find out?'

'From dear little Nancy Davenport. They came back to town last week. Frank has been staying in the North with some man of the name of Carew; decorating his house for him, I think.'

'Yes, I know ; I have had several letters from her. So she told you ? Frank forbade her to do so.'

'Indeed ; that accounts for many things ! Well, I have found you at last ; I began to despair of doing so. Did I wait well, by-the-by ?'

'Beautifully ! but how could you do such a thing ? What will the people of the house think ?'

'The people of the house know nothing about it—no one knows of it but the waiter. I only came here to-day. My room is next door to this, and I bribed the waiter to let me help him to carry in your dinner. Don't be anxious—no one knows—no one need ever know.'

'I am glad,' said Katherine ; 'but you made me miserably nervous !'

'And you, do you suppose that you had no effect on me ? I can tell you that it was no easy matter for me to remember my duties with you sitting opposite to me, and looking so sweet and delightful. The scent of those carnations seemed to intoxicate me. How gorgeous they did look ! and how well they suit you ! And to see you sitting there between that grisly old undertaker, and his good lady, who looks as if she lived on railway accidents and bloody murders, it was just like seeing a humming-bird in a cage with a couple of sparrow-hawks. Really, both Mr.——'

'I can't let you say one word against Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock ; you don't know how good and kind they are ! If they did but know what I am doing now, too ! It is so wicked ! I must go—I will not stay here !'

'Not stay here ! I have not said half I want to say. Dear Katherine, do let me hear that you say that you love me ! You do a little, don't you ?'

'Don't ask me any of those questions until January,' said she, in a low voice.

'And then what will you say ?'

'I will say the truth ; you know what that is.'

'Again let me urge you to speak out now, and get the thing over. Tell Hackblock, and the whole lot of them, the honest truth. You ought to do it—don't be angry with me—you ought to do it at once, if you are going to do it at all !'

Katherine hung her head, and made no answer.

'You don't like to do it ?' said he.

'I can't ! When January comes, I'll speak plainly to them, and I'll speak plainly to you. And now I'll go away ; my seeing you here is far more dishonourable than anything else I have done.'

'You certainly shall not go just yet. Don't tell them till January, if you will—I suppose I need not wait till then to tell you how I love you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you. Ask Frank Davenport what I said the moment I saw you.'

'What did you say ? Tell me yourself.'

'I said that if ever I married anyone, it should be you. You

were giving strawberries to a number of poor little wretches of children. You wore a bright-looking silk or satin, or something, and I thought I had never seen such a beautiful girl in my life! I persuaded Mrs. Dalrymple to take me to your father's house that night. I saw you again, and loved you still more; and so it has gone on until now. I have never ceased to love and worship you. Do not try to escape me, for you never will; I am not the kind of man to let you go.'

Katherine was terrified by his vehemence. She half rose, saying: 'It is so late; and I am doing so wrong to be here!'

'Time was made for slaves!' said Barrington, who was wild with happiness.

'We are slaves. We cannot do as we like.'

'Let us do it. Let us have two or three superlatively happy hours, sitting here and loving each other, and not mind what happens afterwards. Sit down again. Don't go.'

'Oh no, no!' exclaimed Katherine; 'I can't do that! You must leave this place at daybreak, and neither see me nor write to me for months; and I must stay here with the Hackblocks, and travel about with them, and go home with them, and be just the same as I have always been, until January comes; and then, if I cannot love Roger, I will tell him so. Go. Do go—leave me, I beg of you.'

Barrington entirely disregarded the latter part of her speech. He did not like the doubtful way in which she spoke, and said in some alarm:

'But are you likely to love him?'

'What do you think?' she asked, looking in his eager face as she spoke, with eyes full of the most earnest and tender affection.

She had risen to her feet to go, some time before; he flung his arms round her, and pressed her to his heart, saying:

'I'll bear anything—I'll do anything, only tell me what you wish. My Katherine, this compensates for all. God bless you, if you must go. You do not know how I love you!'

At this moment—the very moment of their parting—the door suddenly opened, and they saw Mrs. Hackblock, robed in a grey flannel dressing-gown, standing, candle in hand, contemplating the group before her in stern horror and amazement. The light she bore with her served to show her severe white face, from which every vestige of hair had been scrupulously drawn back under the prim and borderless nightcap which still shrouded her head. At the first glimpse of Katherine and Barrington, she had hardly believed her senses; then she stood utterly aghast and speechless.

Katherine, full of shame, disengaged herself from Barrington's embrace, and then stood by his side waiting, yet dreading to hear what this grim visitant would say. It was a horrible moment to Katherine; but all at once she felt a loving hand seeking about for hers—hers all too willing to be found. He did find it, and held

it in his strong encouraging grasp ; and she knew that henceforth he would stand by and protect her.

Mrs. Hackblock saw what he had done, and her indignation at the sight enabled her to speak.

‘Man !’ said she, ‘I insist on your leaving this room.’

‘Allow me first to speak to you,’ said Barrington.

‘Not one word !’ cried she. ‘Don’t attempt to speak to me, for I will not listen ! I have something to say to Miss Carey, but nothing whatever to you. Leave the room, I tell you again. How dare you require to be told so often ?’

‘You think that I am a servant,’ said Barrington, ‘but I am——’

‘I don’t care what you are,’ interrupted Mrs. Hackblock. ‘You are most certainly not a gentleman ! You have behaved abominably, and so has that girl ; and unless she wishes to hear some home-truths in your presence, she had better tell you to go away at once, for I mean to let her know what I think of her !’

On this Barrington wavered, for it might be a relief to Katherine to be alone with this woman.

‘Go, go !’ said Katherine to him. ‘Leave me now. You can offer any explanation you like—I mean you can say anything you really wish to say, to-morrow.’

‘You need not attempt to explain anything to me to-morrow, for I won’t see you, and I don’t suppose that Mr. Hackblock will stoop to do so either ; so will you leave our sitting-room immediately ? You have no right here.’

‘Please go,’ said Katherine. ‘Go at once.’

Barrington was going ; one hearty pressure of Katherine’s hand, one whispered farewell, and he left the room, Mrs. Hackblock making way for him as he went, to avoid all risk of contamination by contact with his clothes. Then she said to Katherine :

‘You need not begin to make long explanations or excuses ; my own eyes have told me all that it is necessary for me to know.’

For the present there seemed to be no danger of Mrs. Hackblock’s being overwhelmed by too many excuses from Katherine, who was standing by the fire, looking far too miserable and ashamed to speak.

‘Katherine,’ continued Mrs. Hackblock, ‘I couldn’t have believed it ! Who could believe that a girl who has had the many advantages that you have had, could have behaved in such a terribly disgraceful way ? It is heart-breaking to think of a girl like you stealing down in the middle of the night to have a secret interview with a man who dares not be seen by daylight ! It is three o’clock—no, it is more. I have heard voices for a long time, and have been disturbed by them ; but no such dreadful idea as that you were one of the speakers ever entered my mind ! Katherine, how could you behave so disgracefully ?’

'I know I have done very wrong,' faltered Katherine—'wrong in many ways.'

'Wrong! That does not half express it. Who is that—that man?'

'He is a friend of ours—he's not a stranger. We know him in London.'

'Then all I can say is you know some one who is not a gentleman. He is no gentleman or he would not have attempted to see you in this underhand manner—and you an engaged girl too!'

'All that is my fault,' pleaded Katherine. 'He knows very little about whether I am engaged or not.'

'I don't see how anyone is to know. You certainly do not behave like an engaged girl——' began Mrs. Hackblock; but Katherine interrupted her by saying:

'You don't know how hard I have tried to love Roger as I ought.'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself to say such a thing! You speak as if there was difficulty about loving him. I should think you might be both proud and thankful to have the offer of such a man! What are you and your family, I should like to know, that you could expect such an excellent offer? However, think of him as you like, you won't have the chance of deceiving him any longer! If you didn't love him, why did you pretend that you did? Why not have the honesty to tell the truth? We did not want you to marry him against your will. You seem to think that you can marry one man and love another! Thank God that Roger has escaped the danger of marrying such a disgraceful creature! You are a disgrace to your father and mother and everybody. As for your father, you will kill him!'

These last words pierced Katherine to the heart. They were so bitterly—so grievously true. She came slowly forward to where Mrs. Hackblock was standing, and said piteously:

'Mrs. Hackblock, I entreat you not to tell my father!' and as she spoke she laid her hand imploringly on Mrs. Hackblock's arm.

In an instant that lady, who such a short while before had loved her as tenderly as if she had been her own daughter, shook off the poor trembling little hand, and said with shrill eagerness:

'Don't touch me, viper! I hate the very thought of you!'

Katherine quivered with pain, but said:

'I am not asking you to do this for my sake, but for my father's. Again I beg you not to tell him.'

'And why is your father to be spared so particularly? My poor husband will have to be told, so will my dear son. You should have taken your father into consideration before you began to behave so infamously.'

'You use very bad words when you speak of what I have done,' said Katherine, at last goaded to anger. 'I am not ashamed of anything I have done but the concealment, and not breaking off my

engagement, and even that has been unintentional. If I had not been engaged to Roger, there is not one thing of which I need be ashamed! I have behaved badly, very badly, but not wickedly.'

Mrs. Hackblock threw up her hands in amazement. 'How you talk! You shameless, wicked, abandoned girl! Perhaps you would like your engagement to go on, and behave in the same way! Perhaps you would like to marry Roger, and behave still worse—if worse can be! Thank God, you are found out! You speak of the hardship of being engaged to my son. All I can say is, if he had had any idea of your true character he would have given up his engagement himself in the greatest horror. He was deceived in you, and so were we. It is over now, and I'll leave you.'

'Mrs. Hackblock,' said Katherine piteously, 'I deserve so much of what you have said to me, that I will patiently bear what is undeserved. Will you sit down for a few minutes, and let me tell you the whole story? I want to tell you the exact truth—I entreat you to listen to me. I may never see you again!'

'That you certainly never will! you can't expect it! I shall never say another word to you after to-night!'

'Then let me speak now, and tell you everything. I know I have behaved very ill, but if you heard all you might forgive some part of my conduct.'

'I? no, never! I've seen enough—I want to know nothing more! I'll say good-night, and good-bye to you. I leave you to your own thoughts and your own conscience, and shall not be at all sorry if you are miserable.'

'I can't help it, then,' said Katherine, struggling to repress a flood of tears. 'I have done my very best to be true and honourable—I've tried hard——'

'It is a great pity then that you have had such remarkably poor success!' observed Mrs. Hackblock, with a terribly bitter sneer; and so saying, she left the room without another word.

Katherine shivered. Already all love was expunged from that heart of cast-iron. Mrs. Hackblock could sneer, and smile bitter smiles, and walk upstairs without casting one parting glance behind her, and go to bed without one thought of passionate sorrow that the girl she had loved so much should be walking in the highway to ruin! All that she felt was resentment—bitter resentment that anyone whom she had condescended to love nearly as well as her own husband and son, should be so unconscious of the enormous favour which had been done her—so indifferent to the splendid lot which it would have secured to her, as to break away from them and choose her own portion in life. It ought justly to be a sorrowful one—sorrowful and perhaps shameful. In the interests of virtue Mrs. Hackblock could not wish it otherwise. All was over between her and Katherine. Once she had loved her deeply, but all that was over for ever. Mrs. Hackblock was not one to feel any

void—any longing to be reconciled, any wish to know that some lower degree of happiness might somewhere or other be lying in store for the culprit.

Katherine, too utterly broken down by bitter reproaches to be able to move, was still standing where Mrs. Hackblock had left her, when she heard the sound of footsteps, and half hoped that her stern judge had returned to say one word of pity or forgiveness. Alas! no such feeling brought Mrs. Hackblock. What she had come to say was this :

‘It is half-past four ; you had better go to your own room—that is, unless you are intending to see that person again. At half-past six I will send Watkins to pack your things, and at eight she will start for London with you. You will not see me in the morning, of course, or Mr. Hackblock either. It will be better for us never to meet again. To-morrow, after your departure, Mr. Hackblock will write to your father, and give him our reasons for sending you back to him in this way.’

This, then, was the end—these friends of a lifetime were henceforth to be strangers to her ! It was miserable to part so. Katherine made one last appeal. She followed Mrs. Hackblock to the foot of the stairs, and said :

‘For pity’s sake, say that you will try to forgive me, sometime !’

‘It would be ridiculous for me to say anything of the kind ! How could I do it ? People are not expected to forgive such conduct as yours—no one ever does.’

‘I am not entirely bad,’ pleaded Katherine, ‘and I shall be so unhappy unless you will say that you will try to forgive me.’

‘You ought to be unhappy ! You have made everyone else so. I’ll say good-night to you, but I will do nothing more. Good-night.’ And so saying, Mrs. Hackblock departed, frigidly just to the last.

Katherine watched her walk slowly upstairs, and then followed her ; but for more than an hour she heard her voice and Mr. Hackblock’s, and trembled to think of the consequences of this night’s work.

CHAPTER XXIV.

‘Nie kommt das Unglück ohne sein Gefolge.’

HEINE.

‘My desolation does begin to make
A better life.’

Antony and Cleopatra.

AT half-past six Katherine’s door opened, and Watkins entered. Watkins was a business-like woman of a certain age, much marked with the small-pox, plain in other respects, severe and thoroughly unflinching. She cast one glance at the bed where Katherine, still in her evening dress, was lying, just as she had thrown herself in her first grief and despair. Watkins had no time to waste in feel-

ing compassion for undeserving people who could not behave themselves when they were well off—a single look was enough for her. She turned coldly away, and began to open the drawers one after the other, empty them of their contents, and swiftly and methodically arrange them in the trunks; and all the time she was thus occupied, Katherine was painfully conscious that this woman must know what had happened—must be perfectly aware that she was being sent home in disgrace. Watkins's first thought, on being roused from her bed at so untimely an hour and ordered to prepare for such an unforeseen journey, had doubtless been that a telegram must have come to summon Miss Carey home; but one question put to the people of the hotel had, of course, disposed of that theory, and put her on the track of the truth. The knowledge of this made Watkins's presence very galling to Katherine, who knew how her own appearance would confirm every suspicion in the maid's mind. What could she think when she observed that she was wearing the dress of the night before—saw her swollen eye-lids, and cheeks stained with much weeping? It was impossible to hide any of these traces of past storm.

'I can pack those things myself, Watkins,' she said impatiently. 'There is not much to do, and I'll do it; I had rather.'

Watkins pressed her lips together primly for a second or so, apparently to regulate the amount of reprobation which was to issue forth from them, and then said coldly and decisively:

'Mrs. Hackblock wishes me to do it. I have had her orders. She is very particular about your not missing the first train that goes.'

Katherine had thrown a shawl over herself during the night; on this she hastily drew it more over her face to hide an irresistible spasm of pain. It is not pleasant to have your misdemeanours laid bare to the servants' hall; but, as Mrs. Hackblock would have said, 'That should have been thought of before she committed them.'

Presently Watkins said brusquely:

'I'll trouble you for that dress you have on, Miss Carey.'

Katherine was startled; she felt that there was a considerable amount of repressed incivility in the woman's tone and manner, but there was nothing in the words that she could specially resent, for it was undoubtedly desirable that she should change the thin black lace dress she was wearing, for the warm camel's-hair costume which Watkins had set apart for the journey. She had left out everything Katherine was likely to want, and had shown much more forethought in her selection than the poor bewildered girl herself could have done. In spite of that, Katherine longed to get rid of her, and said:

'Go downstairs then, if you want it, and I'll put it off and arrange myself a little; I don't wish to have you here while I do it.'

The next moment she regretted having spoken so crossly,

Watkins returned no answer, but left the room. Katherine undressed rapidly, and began to dress afresh. While moving some things from chair to chair, the carnations she had worn the evening before fell heavily to the ground. She picked them up and kissed them.

‘How sweet you are ! and how beautiful still !’ said she. ‘He admired you, and he shall have you.’

She folded them in a small packet, and addressed them to ‘Lewis Barrington, Esq.’ ; but how was she to give them ? Her room after her departure would doubtless be visited by fierce birds of prey, and swept as bare of all that they would think unclean as the streets of an Eastern town. If she saw him, she would silently put them in his hand ; he, at any rate, loved and did not despise her.

Katherine’s mind was in a turmoil of delight and despair. Her heart leapt with joy at Barrington’s love and her own freedom—her soul trembled with terror of what her father would say when he heard that she had been sent home, at an hour’s notice, like a child in shameful disgrace ; and in such alternations the livelong day was passed.

Watkins came like a gaoler, and brought her a cup of coffee and some bread and butter ; and Katherine swallowed all she brought, to show that she had a good conscience. When she left her room to go, the stairs were dark, the Hackblocks’ door shut ; the sitting-room door was open. She paused there for a moment, and, with a fluttering heart, saw the chair where she had sat such a short while before, and the bit of carpet which Barrington’s knees had pressed. She did not linger long, but sighed, and pushed her way onward. It seemed so strange to this hitherto tenderly cared-for girl that she could be treated with anger and scorn—that she could actually be sent on a long and wearisome journey with no kind friend to bid her farewell, and no companion but a grim domestic who had a bad opinion of her !

It was almost pitiful to see how Katherine’s eyes wandered about in search of some one who would give her one look of kindness before she left that place. Up to the last, she had had a lurking hope that Barrington might come out for one happy moment, and thus send her away with a thought of comfort in her heart ; but she entered the omnibus without seeing anyone but servants. Watkins followed quickly after with bags and rugs, and then came the waiter, who must have been bribed by Barrington the day before. Katherine seized the opportunity at once, and put the little packet in his hand, saying :

‘Give this, please.’

She likewise presented him with a sovereign for himself ; and ever afterwards that gentleman affirmed, that ‘some said one thing, and some another ; but that he, for his part, judged of people as

he found them, and both Mr. Barrington and the young lady were tip-top gentlefolks, and had a way with them that was very pleasant to do with ; and he, for one, didn't see why they shouldn't keep company together if they liked.'

Watkins sniffed suspiciously, but had too large a soul to interfere with a fellow-servant's 'perquisites.' At the railway-station she mounted guard, but no Barrington appeared ; and in a minute or two more the train departed, all chance of seeing him was gone, and Katherine was being whirled on her way homewards, with nothing to distract her thoughts from the terrible explanation which awaited her when she got there. She thought of this with such anxiety and apprehension, that at length she could suffer no more, but fell into a dull stupor of fatigue and dread.

It was nearly midnight before she reached home ; her heart felt like lead as the cab stopped at her father's door. It was opened almost as soon as the bell rang, and both her father and Dilston were there.

'Oh, father !' said she, and dared say no more.

To Katherine's great surprise, he threw his arms round her, and embraced her with passionate warmth and tenderness, saying :

'Yes, dear, it is very terrible ; but Mr. Hackblock's telegram was such a relief to me ! I was afraid that you would not be able to get home in time !'

Katherine started back from the clasp of his loving arms, and said :

'In time ? What is it ? Is mother ill ?'

'Yes ; don't you know ? Didn't Mrs. Hackblock tell you before you came away ? What did she say to you ?'

'She said I was to go home,' replied Katherine, looking uneasily at Watkins, who had told the cab to wait for her, and was now standing in an attitude of attention by the door. 'She sent Watkins with me.'

'How kind ! I am sure I am very much obliged to her for sending you off so quickly, and not saying anything to alarm you when you had such a long journey to go before you could get home. Your mother is very ill ! I wanted you back, and telegraphed for you ; but I had no idea that you could be with us so quickly ! Until I got Mr. Hackblock's telegram, I thought you could not be here till to-morrow ; you see, I only telegraphed for you about eleven this morning.'

At eleven o'clock that morning—three hours after Katherine had started on her journey ! That thought flashed through her mind ; then she timidly put this question :

'What did Mr. Hackblock say in his telegram ?'

'Expect your daughter at 11.50 to-night.'

'Did he say nothing more ?' inquired Katherine, who, in all her distress at hearing of her mother's illness, had still sufficient presence

of mind to desire that her father and mother might be spared the knowledge of what had happened, until it was less likely to be dangerous to them.

There was every reason to hope that, for the present, they would believe that she had come in consequence of their telegram; and as that telegram would inform the Hackblocks of Mrs. Carey's alarming illness, it was not improbable that even they, hard-hearted as they were, would not despatch the letter which was to crush the Careys with the knowledge of their daughter's misconduct, while they were in such affliction.

'Yes, that was all; but it was all I wanted. They have sent you off wonderfully quickly, and I am extremely grateful to them. It is marvellous! I couldn't have believed that you would be here so soon!'

'May I go to my mother?' said poor Katherine. 'Is she really so very ill?'

Mr. Carey shook his head, and she saw his eyes fill with tears.

'She has often been very ill before, father, and got better.'

'Yes; but I can't help being very much afraid this time,' said he, stroking the comforting hand Katherine had slipped into his; then they prepared to go.

'I'll wish you good-night, then, Miss Carey,' said Watkins, whom they had forgotten. 'I am to go to Grosvenor Place, and stay there till Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock return. If you please, sir, Mr. Hackblock charged me to say that you would receive a letter from him to-morrow.'

'Thank you, my good woman. It is very kind of him to think of me in my trouble. Stop—stop!' cried he, for the door was open, and Watkins going; and, even in his great distress, he remembered that he ought to make her a handsome present. 'There! Good-night to you, Mrs. Watkins; I am very much obliged to you for taking such care of my daughter. I shall never forget Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock's kindness in getting her off so quickly. Katherine, I hope you thanked them; but I am sure you would.'

Katherine did not dare to look in Mrs. Watkins' face. It was an immense relief when the door closed on her. When once she was gone, she felt that the shameful news would be withheld from those dear to her until next day's post, and perhaps even longer, unless the Hackblocks' hearts were made of stone.

'Come to mother,' she said. 'Dear father, you ought to have sent for me sooner.'

'I have longed for you—I have felt as if I could not go on another day without having the comfort of your presence, but your dear mother won't believe that she is so ill, and has opposed your being sent for; besides, your letters showed that you were happy, darling. Why should we bring you into this house of trouble a day sooner than was really necessary?'

Katherine shook her head, and exclaimed :

‘How I wish I had never left this house!’

They had by this time reached Mrs. Carey’s door. Mr. Carey stopped, and said :

‘I ought to tell you that you are not likely to find her awake. She takes a great deal of opium, and sleeps the greater part of the day. I have no doubt she is asleep now—that’s why I have been in no hurry to take you to her.’

‘Is she much changed?’ Katherine faltered as she put this question. She was in such dread of the answer to it.

‘She is thinner, but more beautiful than ever. It is fearful to see her life slipping away inch by inch, and feel one can do nothing!’

Together they entered the room. There was light enough to see the bed, but a curtain was drawn before it. Mrs. Carey’s maid came and said that her mistress had been asleep for two hours or more.

‘And how much longer will her sleep last?’ inquired Katherine.

‘Perhaps till seven o’clock in the morning. I don’t think it will, though. She is more likely to awake for a short time during the night, but if she does she won’t be herself quite—she will still be affected by the opium.’

‘She is forced to have these opiates,’ said Mr. Carey; ‘without them her sufferings are terrible.’

‘I’ll stay here with you, Clarke,’ said Katherine; ‘I must be here when she awakes.’

Mr. Carey thought his daughter required rest after such great fatigue as she had undergone, and said so; but Katherine was firm.

‘Lie down on the sofa then, and rest,’ said he. ‘Clarke will rouse you when your mother opens her eyes.’

Katherine assented, and after stealing to the bedside to try to see her mother, did lie down on the sofa to rest.

‘Rest!’ She mentally used that word as she lay down, but only because her father had used it—only to feel what a bitter mockery it was for anyone to speak of her and of rest in the same breath! How could she close her eyes in peace—she who in two days at most was to see the mother who loved her so well torn away from her sight for ever!—she who in four short weeks might see her father reduced to beggary, and burdened with shame and dishonour because she herself had not had sufficient strength of mind and honour to keep the promise she had given him! What rest, or peace, or hope, or comfort could there be for her? How woefully she had failed! She could not think of it without abject shame. It was lamentable, it was degrading, to have been so contemptibly weak! She had never liked the idea of keeping on an engagement which she was all but certain could never terminate in a marriage; but when she promised to let it go on six months longer, she ought to have been bound by her promise, and with all the more rigid

exactitude of honour, because she felt that she was taking part in a somewhat doubtful transaction. She had failed—failed pitifully and most dishonourably, and it was more than probable that her failure would bring ruin on her father much more surely than if she had said in a straightforward, true-hearted way :

‘I cannot marry Roger, because I do not love him enough.’

Now that had been said, and much more besides, and she had heard what Mrs. Hackblock thought of her. Never would she forget her looks and her words! Never before that night had Katherine seen one glance of scorn or unkindness that was called forth by anything that she herself had said or done. That immunity was over—she must be prepared for many such words and looks now. She knew—she recognised only too clearly that the good days of her life had come to an end. Trouble and misery lay before her. She was cast down from the high place of safety where the tender care of loving parents had established her; and now she, who as yet had never known what it was to be without loving arms to fly to—who had never so much as imagined what it might be to have to struggle alone—now she might have to learn by sharp experience how bitterly cruel life and its dealings can be.

The restraint imposed on her by the fact of her being in the room with one hovering between life and death was almost unendurable. Her sufferings were so intense in their agony that it was almost impossible to keep still; and—bitter, wretched thought!—all this was caused by one act of weakness. If she had but gone to bed as she ought—if she had but refused to dally with the temptation to go downstairs for that fatal half-hour’s conversation with Barrington, she would now have had the support of her father’s love and courage to look forward to; instead of which he, when he learnt the truth, would be as much overwhelmed by it as she was. Now, thank God, he was asleep, and there was just a hope that he might be spared the knowledge a little longer. There she lay watching the flickering firelight, thinking these terrible thoughts. Once or twice Clarke came and looked at her. Then Katherine shut her eyes and feigned sleep. Clarke put a warm fur cloak over her. Warmth, alas! brought no comfort to Katherine. Towards morning she fell into an uneasy slumber; when she again became conscious, the room was filled with comfortless grey light. The fire was still burning, Clarke asleep in a chair by Mrs. Carey’s bed. Clarke’s eyes did not remain closed for many minutes. She came to Katherine, and said: ‘She has slept the whole night through without any more medicine!’

‘Is that a good sign?’ inquired Katherine, with eager hope.

‘Miss Katherine, it’s good as far as it goes; but no sign can amount to much now. Don’t you be so troubled, miss. You wouldn’t want to keep her if you were with her when the pain was on.’

Presently Mrs. Carey opened her eyes, and said :

'Clarke, has Miss Katherine come? I have been dreaming that she was here. That's why I have slept so long—I would not let myself wake up from that good dream.'

'She is here, ma'am. She is standing close beside your bed, afraid to show herself, lest she startles you.'

'How can she startle me?' said Mrs. Carey, showing no surprise whatever.

Katherine stooped to kiss her mother, and then knelt down with her hand in hers.

'I have wanted you so much, dear—there are many things I must say to you before I go.'

'You should have let father send for me.'

'Oh no. I saw that he wanted you to stay where you were, and did not like to disappoint him; besides, I shall have time. They say that I shall not live more than two days, but I know better. People have much more control over the day of their death than is imagined. Clarke says this is the 11th of October; I shall live another week—perhaps longer.'

'Perhaps you will get well again, mother. God grant you may!'

'Impossible! but let me use the time which is left me. Kiss me again, dear; you are the joy of my life! Have been the joy of my life, I ought to say, for my life is over. Sit down where I can see you, Katherine, and let me talk to you.'

'Oh no, ma'am,' said Clarke; 'you must not talk now; you must take this tea first.'

Mrs. Carey obeyed; then she said :

'I sometimes think my life has been a very selfish one. I ought to have made an effort to go about like other people. Perhaps if I had, I should have got strong again. My illness has been such a trial to your father. He has had no comfort in his life—none whatever!'

'Don't think of that. He loves you, mother; whatever he has done for you, he has done gladly.'

'I know it; that's what makes me grieve so for him. For twenty years he has sacrificed everything to me—he has had a very sad life. Katherine, you are young and strong: promise me that when I am gone you will do all you can to make his last years happy. Let him have some joy in his life before he dies.'

'Mother, I will! I will! There is no need to ask me. I promise you I will. I am sure to do it. He shall be my first thought!'

'I don't wish that—Roger must be your first thought; but be good to your father too. I am not saying this because I doubt you, but because sometimes when girls marry and are happy, they forget how time goes, and how very little they are seeing of their parents, who have nothing else to love and live for. Your father is so unselfish he would never complain. After losing me he must have no other trouble—he could not bear it.'

‘He shall have nothing to complain of, mother—I promise you that!’

‘I trust you. It is a happiness to him even to see you; so it is to me. You will never know how we have both loved you! I must not say much more. Oh, stay! there is one thing which I must say now, lest I never have another chance. I must tell you something which will, I hope, be a comfort to you hereafter. You don’t know how grateful I am to you for your love and kindness, and for being what you are—so thoroughly trustworthy! You don’t know what it is to a poor woman who is chained to her bed or sofa, to know that she has a girl who can be trusted alone anywhere! I have never had the slightest anxiety about you, dear. I have always felt that you might come and go, and do as you liked, for you were certain to act rightly; you are so good and honourable that you are as safe alone as other girls are with their chaperons. I did so want to say this to you.’

Mrs. Carey was holding Katherine’s hand, but could not see her face. At the first words of undeserved praise, Katherine had drawn the curtain slightly before her. Had Mrs. Carey seen that most unhappy tear-stained face, or caught one glimpse of the painful expression which had come over it, she would have had some faint idea of the torture she was inflicting on her child. Katherine could not speak—dared not make any attempt to check her mother; all she could do was to strain every nerve to prevent the misery she felt from making itself apparent by breaking forth in sobs, or utterly unrestrained weeping. Clarke saw what she was suffering—nay, more, she partly guessed the cause. All that coming and going of letters and notes to the house over the way during the month of June, had not entirely escaped comment in the servants’-hall. She did not exactly approve of young ladies who had two lovers at the same time, but she felt very sorry when she saw Miss Katherine crying so, and very sure she had been a good daughter. She had lived twenty years with the Careys, and could not always hide her feelings; so, womanlike, she came to Katherine, put her arms tenderly round her, kissed her forehead, and said:

‘Bear up, miss—bear up! Mistress wants to give you something to think of that will make you happy afterwards.’

‘That’s true, Clarke,’ said Mrs. Carey, whose hearing was unusually acute. ‘That’s why I am saying it. Her conduct has been an inestimable comfort to me, and she ought to know it.’

‘Don’t praise me, mother; I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve any of the praise you are giving me,’ sobbed most unhappy Katherine.

‘You will make mistress cry too, if you cry, and that’s bad for her,’ said Clarke.

So Katherine had to nerve herself, and sit still, and let one blow of the knife after another penetrate her heart.

'There is nothing to cry about. You will be glad some day to know what a blessing you have been to me! You deserve all I say, and more. I have seen how well you have behaved. I have watched you when you were not aware of it, so I know. What would have become of me if you had been different? I should have been in constant anxiety! No; you are a good girl, and may be trusted in any place and under any circumstances! God bless you for the comfort that knowledge has been to me! It has made me feel that I could obey my doctors with peace of mind, for my unhappy illness would not hurt anyone but myself. You have been very much neglected, my poor child, quite as much as your father; but, thank God, no harm has come of it. Kiss me, my darling. I have said what I wished to say to you; your modesty puts my praise away from you, but it's all true and well-deserved. God bless you, my child! Now I'll die when death likes.'

Katherine shivered with shame as she felt her mother's kiss. She hastily left the room. 'God is my witness,' said she to herself, 'that I do not intend to pass through such a fearful scene as this without being the better for it! Mother, my darling, your words shall bear fruit! After the present necessity for keeping silence is over, never again will I play the part of a treacherous deceiver. I would at once go and tell the truth to my father, if I did not fear that he would not be able to conceal his distress.'

CHAPTER XXV.

'Sure 'tis not he? This is some woeful thing,
 Wrapped up in grief—some shadow of a man.'

FORD.

'*Loo.* What dost thou think on?
Flam. Nothing, of nothing: leave thy idle questions.
 I am i' the way to study a long silence.'

WEBSTER.

'Why, here's plain dealing; I commend thee for 't,
 And all the worst I wish thee is, Heaven bless thee!'

FORD.

MRS. CAREY lingered more than a week, but never again was able to speak much. Her last days were cheered by the most tender love and care; and, as during that time the Hackblocks abstained from depicting Katherine in the dark colours in which they saw her, Mr. Carey had no grief to struggle with but the one great one, and his wife never knew that those dear to her were threatened with any other misfortune than that of losing her.

'Thank God for that!' was Katherine's grateful thought, 'and thank those people too! If father had known all, he could not have hidden it from mother.'

Of course Mr. Carey had not been to the office during the past ten

days, nor had he expressed much surprise at not receiving letters of sympathy from the Hackblocks. If he once or twice began to wonder at it, wonder was speedily lost sight of in the effort to be equal to the large demands each new day made on his fortitude. He had heard that Roger's return had been expected, but supposed he had not come. There was not room in his mind for any thought but one.

Poor Katherine ! She went through the trial bravely, supporting her father, attending to her mother, and waiting in fear and trembling for the time when the truth must be made known.

On the afternoon of the day on which Mrs. Carey died, Katherine went to her father's study. He was sitting looking into the fire, very calm, but very sad. She knelt down by his side ; without turning to look at her, he put his arm round her and said :

'I have nothing left now but you, dear.'

'I am going to try to be a better daughter than I have been,' she said humbly ; 'mother told me I must. She talked to me a great deal one night. She said you had sacrificed your life to her, and that I was to do something towards repaying the debt she owed you. I can't do much—but you will let me try?'

'Dear child, how you talk ! You have nothing to do but live. What should I be without you ?'

After some quiet conversation, Mr. Carey said :

'I have been making a list of those who are to be asked to the funeral. I suppose the Hackblocks must have come home by this time?'

Katherine started. However, it was right that they should be invited, whether they came or not. When the funeral was over, she would have to tell the truth.

The Hackblocks sent no letters of condolence, and none of them attended the funeral. Mr. Carey had expected to be accompanied by his partners as by a band of brothers, but Mr. Higgins alone was there. Even in the midst of his great affliction, Mr. Carey felt wounded by this omission. He was proud of the high place which his talents and character had won for him in that honourable and long-established firm, and having won it, felt that he had a right to expect that every member should associate himself with him in all the great occasions of life. Besides, there was a still stronger tie between him and two of the members ; and if old Mr. Hackblock was ill, Roger was not. At any cost, the betrothed husband of his only daughter ought to have shown her family that mark of respect and sympathy. Mr. Carey was never once alone until evening, so Katherine could not speak to him ; but when the last friend had departed, she knew that the time had come. What a pale, sad ghost she looked, as, clad in her long black dress and full of grief and shame, she crept to his side to tell him the painful story ! He was standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the door. He did not hear her come in, but was aware of her soft hand as she put it

in his ; he tried to speak, but could not. Katherine felt almost choked, and that even before she had opened her lips. Her fear was, that when he had heard her, it would seem to him that he had nothing left to live for.

She began to speak the moment she was mistress of her voice.

‘Father, was Roger there?’

‘No,’ replied he, in a voice full of gloomy irritation.

‘And none of the Hackblocks?’

‘No, none of the Hackblocks!’

‘Do not be angry with them ; I’ll tell you why they were not there. Can you bear to hear something which will pain you—which you will think disgraceful?’

‘You have broken off with Roger?’ exclaimed Mr. Carey.

‘He has broken off with me ! It was my fault that he did ! Let me tell you.’

She did tell him, and with perfect truth and absence of all attempt to colour her narration or extenuate her fault. He listened in absolute but dismayed silence, with eyes fixed on the fire. Katherine never paused until she had told all.

He did not speak when her story was done, nor did he seem to know how eagerly she was waiting for some word of forgiveness. His rigid face frightened her.

‘Father, say something!’ said she ; ‘speak to me ; just say that you are not too angry with me to love me!’

He shook his head, but did not otherwise answer this appeal.

‘Father, I have now no one but you ; you will not cast me off?’

He made a great effort, and said :

‘No, never ; and I will try not to blame you, but you have undone the work of my whole life!’

‘You really think that Mr. Hackblock will visit this on you?’ said she, in great distress.

‘I do ; but I cannot talk of it. What is done can’t be undone.’

‘We must talk of it,’ replied Katherine impetuously. ‘Will you not go to him, and say all that you can to excuse what I did ? There are so many things which might be said ; Mrs. Hackblock refused to listen to me when I wanted to tell her that Mr. Barrington was there. Tell him that I really was perfectly true to Roger, and faithful to my promise to you, until that unhappy night when Mr. Barrington came on me by surprise, and somehow I did what he asked me, and went downstairs to see him. I only went for a few minutes. I was just going to leave him, when Mrs. Hackblock came.’

‘What would be the use of my telling him that you had behaved well until you were tempted ? That’s all you can find to say in excuse of your conduct, it seems.’

‘Oh no, it isn’t ! I have often been tempted, and always was true to Roger—quite true. You might tell them so, and how hard I tried to love him.’

'You imagine that that would please them? It would only infuriate them! They think that you ought to have been only too glad to have the love of such a man as their son Roger; and so do I, Katherine. You don't, so we will say no more about it. You fell when you ought to have stood firm, and you have brought me down with you. So be it; my life is nearly over, but yours is not.'

'Father! you speak so coldly—I might be quite a stranger! I know I have done wrong, but don't talk in that voice.'

Katherine's own voice broke as she said this. Mr. Carey put his arm round her neck, kissed her, and with a great effort said:

'Dear, I can't quite control my voice, but I love you. You are your mother's and mine—how can I do otherwise? Do not distress yourself about my manner. I must show some feeling. I am a ruined man!'

His words stung Katherine to the heart far more surely than any reproaches could have done. She took his passive hand, and kissed it very humbly; then she said faintly:

'Let us think if there is nothing that we could do to make things better.'

'That's impossible! We can only wait. This day week will tell us what we have to expect. I know it now, though.'

So saying, he covered his face with both hands; and though Katherine tried every means in her power, she could not draw another word from him. She well knew what he meant when he said that he should know the worst that day week. It was the day when the firm to which he belonged would be dissolved and reconstructed. After a while she gave up trying to rouse him, for he did not seem to hear anything she said; but she sat where she was by his side, resolved not to move until he did. When after a long time he got up, he saw that she was sitting on the floor, at his feet, but did not appear surprised, nor had he anything to say to her. His manner and aspect awed Katherine so much that the words of pleading which she desired to utter froze on her lips, and though she watched him feeling his way out of the room as if he were blind, she did not dare to help him; something seemed to have come between them which kept her off. And yet he stumbled as one in the dark. The hall and stairs were well-lighted, but no light seemed to be there to him. Dilston came forward and put a bedroom-candle in his hand, with the deepest compassion in his eyes as he watched the unhappy old man holding by the rail to go upstairs. Katherine followed, terror-stricken at the sight of the suffering she herself had had such a large share in inflicting on him. As he passed the door which led to his wife's rooms, he faltered a moment—a more human look came into his stony, expressionless eyes—one look of passionate love and grief—he pressed his hand against his heart as if in physical pain, and then slowly struggled

onwards upstairs. Katherine took his arm and guided him ; he let her do as she liked, but did not seem to know that she was there. To him, for the time being, he and his own sorrow filled up the whole compass of the universe, and all else was non-existent. She put his candle on the table, and stood waiting for one sign that he did not disown her. All that she could gather from his expression was that he wished to be left alone. So, humbly enough, she went away. She dared not go far, but crouched down on the mat outside his door, with her aching head resting on her knees. She did not know that it ached. After a while she heard him fling himself on his bed with a heavy groan—even that miserable sound was a relief to her. She still dared not go away, and for two long hours stayed there, unconscious of cold and fatigue—of everything but a sickening dread that she had killed her father. The perfect stillness alarmed her more than anything. At last she could bear it no longer, and in her agony opened the door, but so gently that it was impossible for him to be disturbed by it ; and after standing on the threshold long enough to quiet the beating of her own heart, she heard by his breathing that he was asleep. Then he was safe, and in nature's blessed keeping !

Next day he was ill, and never left his bed ; the next day the same. During these days he saw the doctor, who looked on his illness as altogether natural under the circumstances, though he only knew that Mr. Carey had his wife's loss to bewail. Katherine was more anxious—he was so quiet.

'Have you slept, father?' said she.

'I? No! At least I do not know ;' and whatever she said, it was the same. He knew nothing clearly, and could not understand what was asked. His mind had received a shock it could not readily recover from. On the third day he said he would get up and go to the office, but did not look well enough to go, and must have felt that this was the case, for he ordered a fire to be lighted in his study. After breakfast he went there in silence. Katherine was afraid to follow, but still more afraid to lose sight of him, so she timidly opened the door and looked in. He had not begun to do anything, but was standing by the fire which had so lately been lighted for him. Then he sat down, and looked at her with an expression which seemed to intimate that she must go away before he could do anything.

'Don't send me away, father,' said she, for it was impossible to mistake his look. 'Let me help you somehow.'

'No ; I must be alone.'

'Father, I have no one to go to,' she said piteously. 'Let me stay.'

He passed his hand across his eyes, either to clear his thoughts or wipe away a tear.

'I'll sit quite still. Say I may stay ; I like to be with you.'

Never before had Katherine made a loving speech to her father without a prompt recognition of it from him ; but no smile, or glance, or touch of love followed her words now—his mind had no room in it for thoughts of tenderness. She sat by him in silence, waiting until she understood enough of the task to which he was about to apply himself, to begin to help him. It was not easy to do that, for at first he only pulled open one drawer after another of the library-table at which he was sitting, and shut them again, as if the effort of examining their contents were too great for his strength. At last he opened the upper one, which was full of yellow old papers, older by far than anything else in the house but himself. Letters from his father to him on his coming up to London to push his fortunes ; tender little scrawls from a loving but illiterate mother ; account-books full of entries of frugal expenses and sternly restricted pleasures ; pocket-books with miniature fashion-plates and Cuitt's picturesque engravings of old water-mills, riverside gateways, and ancient towers, which have long ago been swept away to make room for factories and gasworks. Such were the things that filled this drawer. One by one Mr. Carey examined them slowly and tenderly, and then threw them into the fire, and watched them being reduced to tinder.

'Father,' said Katherine, 'you have kept those books till now ; don't burn them : it is so nice to have those old things.'

'They are of no interest to anyone but me. Some one will have to burn them some day. I may as well do it myself—I like it.'

That was anything but true, for it was easy to see by the contraction of his features what pain it was to him to part with these carefully stored up records of his youth. Little by little the entire contents of the drawer went into the fire. The next drawer contained papers of a slightly later date. These, too, went. Even a little packet containing the first letters he had ever received from his wife was committed, though not without many a lingering look, to the flames. Katherine dared not remonstrate—something in his face made it impossible. He himself, however, was beginning to feel the strain on his fortitude to be too great ; he sat as if he could do no more. At this unfortunate moment Dilston came in with a large letter, which nearly covered the whole of the tray. Instinctively, Katherine knew that it was the Hackblocks' letter of denunciation. Mr. Carey took it, read it quietly to the end, then laid it on the table as if buried in thought. Once he looked at Katherine, but his look conveyed neither condemnation nor any other feeling ; he merely glanced at her, and turned away again.

She rose to her feet, and said :

'Dear father, I should be happier if you would reproach me.'

He shook his head, and answered :

'I will not reproach you. God grant that you are not the greatest sufferer from what you have done ! You shall hear no reproaches

from me. On the contrary, I wish to thank you for having told me the exact truth. That, I see, you have done.'

'I have—I will—I always will, father. I had a letter from Mr. Barrington three days ago.'

'You are not to reply to it!'

'I have done so.'

'Show me his letter.'

Without a moment's hesitation she put the letter in his hand. It was one of sympathy. He said he had been detained in Scotland by illness, and had only just returned, and heard what had happened. He ended by saying, 'Remember that, in three months' time, I claim your promise.'

'Put that letter in the fire, Katherine,' said Mr. Carey, as he returned it to her.

Slowly Katherine stretched forth her hand, and took the paper which was so dear to her, and laid it on the fire, hoping it would be long before the cruel flames caught it.

'You ought not to have answered that letter,' said Mr. Carey. 'What did you say?'

'I can tell you the very words I used: "Thank you heartily for your kind letter. Do not write to me again until I say you may." That was all, father.'

'That man has been your curse, and will continue to be so to the end! Mark my words, Katherine. He will be your curse to the end! When he comes near you, you forget every obligation, however solemn and binding. That young man will ruin your life if you don't break loose from his influence.'

Katherine trembled at words which were, she feared, but too true. They rang in her ears long after they had been spoken. Her father went on with his work; but now she had this to think about, and did not follow his movements so carefully—besides, he had spoken to her, and thus relieved one large part of her anxiety. He had said Barrington had been a curse to her, and would be so. He spoke as if uttering a prediction—pray God it might be an untrue one!

At length she was roused by seeing her father take up Mr. Hackblock's letter.

'I suppose there is no good in keeping this?' said he, tearing it in half, and throwing it into the fire.

He was burning everything!

'What are the occasions on which men usually burn their papers?' she asked herself. 'Before undertaking a long journey,' was the reply she hastened to make, for her thoughts were thrusting forward another and a worse answer—'before death;' and then, with a shudder, she remembered that death, too, was a journey, and of the longest.

Soon her thoughts became healthier, and she saw that what her

father was doing was only the natural effort of a strong and extremely active mind to revert to its usual habits. He shrank from work at the office, because at the office he might see the Hackblocks ; but, having begun to occupy himself at home, his mind would soon recover its equilibrium. Whatever might have been Mr. Carey's motive for undertaking the examination of these drawers, it is a fact that before nightfall he had burned every paper which had been stored in them—nothing was so sacred to memory that it escaped the flames.

Next day he went through accounts : on some of these he made explanatory notes. He seemed better in every way, but was still indisposed to talk. On the fifth day he went to business. No Hackblocks were at the office—none had been there all the week, said the head clerk. They had gone down to Brighton—the old gentleman was ill ; but no doubt Mr. Carey knew more about them than he did.

‘I know nothing—absolutely nothing !’ said Mr. Carey.

‘Well, you will see them at the meeting, sir. They’ll have to come up for that.’

‘The old gentleman was ill.’ Mr. Carey’s heart smote him ; he knew why he was ill.

Katherine grew more and more anxious as the 2nd of November—the decisive day—drew near. When the morning came, and she opened her eyes, she fancied that there had been some mistake, and that she had been called during the night. All was obscure—it was hardly the darkness of an early winter’s morning, but dense, and almost palpable. It was the first fog of the season.

‘I hope it is not a bad omen,’ thought she. ‘I am afraid father will think it so ;’ and this feeling made her dress with the utmost speed.

She had a great wish to go to the office with him, and sit in the carriage until the meeting was over. Whatever was the result of that meeting, she wished to be with him when he first knew it. She went down, feeling her way by the balusters. The breakfast-room was full of a solid something which seemed to contest every inch of space with her.

Katherine was early, but Mr. Carey earlier still, and he had begun his breakfast without waiting for her.

‘The fog is so bad, I thought I had better get off as soon as I could. It may take me a long time to go to Walbrook.’

‘Father,’ said Katherine, ‘I want to go with you. I know I can’t go near the office,—because of seeing—because—you know why ; but let us go in the carriage, and let me sit in it and wait until you come out, and then we could come home together.’

‘Oh no ! why should you ? I can’t think why you should wish to do such a thing ! It’s quite out of the question !’

Katherine dared not give him her true reason.

‘Because I shall be so miserable about your being out in the fog if I don’t go—I don’t know how bad fogs are when people are out in them. I shall sit here and imagine all kinds of horrors; and perhaps you won’t be in half so much danger as I am fancying. Do let me go, father! I beg you to let me!’

Mr. Carey was not to be prevailed on; he again said it was impossible. Katherine ceased to entreat; but only because she had resolved to take the carriage, and meet him as soon as he left the office.

‘What time will your meeting be over?’ she asked therefore.

‘I don’t know—early, most likely; I can’t say.’

‘By three?’

‘I think not; but it may be.’

She could see how troubled he was. He was thinking what a small space of time now divided him from possible ruin.

‘But are you not going very early? It is only ten now.’

‘Yes; but I told you I was going early because of the fog, and I have two or three things to do.’

Just before Mr. Carey started, the fog suddenly dispersed; and, though the sun was not strong enough to break forth, the atmosphere was considerably lightened, and what was more, all sense of gloom and oppression departed.

Katherine ran to her father, who was nervously preparing to leave the house, and exclaimed:

‘It’s an omen, father! Take courage.’

He tried to look hopeful, but could not; took the gloves she gave him, kissed her, and said:

‘Good-bye, dear; I’m going.’ He had not left the house more than three minutes before he returned, kissed her much more tenderly, and said, ‘Good-bye; I hope you don’t think me an unkind father. I have things to try me—that’s why I seem so unkind sometimes.’

She flung herself into his arms and clung to him, weeping as she did so, and saying with heartfelt emotion:

‘You unkind, dear father! no one has ever been so good as you have been to me!’

Then he went, and she stood at the door watching him go down the street. He walked to the very end of it without finding a cab, and so passed out of her sight; and then she remembered an old superstition, that if you watch anyone quite out of sight, you never again see that person alive. She was thoroughly overwrought, and went in to make herself still more miserable about this. About twelve, Nancy Davenport came. She had been a frequent visitor of late, but Katherine had little heart to talk to her now. She offered to accompany her into the City, but Katherine declined, on the ground that her father might not like a third person.

‘Then let me wait here until you come back,’ said Nancy. ‘You

say that something which affects your happiness and his is being decided ; let me stay and hear the result. I'll creep away if it is bad, but if it is good let me enjoy it with you. Don't be afraid ; it will be good, dear.'

'I dare not hope,' said Katherine.

At one, she left the house ; but even before that time the fog had begun to return. In the Strand it was dense ; still the driver could see his way. Each moment, however, that became more difficult, and at last he had to lead his horse. It was half-past two before Katherine reached the office, and then one part of her plan could not be carried out. She wanted to watch the door and pick up her father when he came out ; but no one could see anything at all, and she was obliged to send the coachman to the porter to bid him tell Mr. Carey that his carriage was outside and would wait his pleasure. The coachman returned almost directly to say that Mr. Carey had left the office at half-past one.

'Is the man certain of that?' said Katherine.

'Quite, ma'am.'

'Ask him to come here for one minute. Say it is Miss Carey who wants to ask him a question.'

'Mr. Carey left before the fog came on so bad,' said the porter, when he came. 'It would be half-past one o'clock when he went away.'

'Was he alone?'

'Yes, quite alone, miss.'

Katherine dared not ask how he looked, so she inquired if the other partners went at the same time.

'No, miss ; they are here now, some of them. Would you like to speak to any of them?'

'Oh no, thank you!' she exclaimed, shuddering at the mere suggestion. 'I'll go home. I suppose my father has gone there. Which way did he go?'

'Straight along the street, I think. Most likely he has taken the train. You'll find him at home, miss, when you get back.'

Katherine was comforted. This man must have heard some hint of the result of the meeting, and would certainly not take so much interest in her father if he had ceased to be one of his masters. So she resigned herself to creeping home at a snail's pace, glad to think that when she got there, she would be reunited to her father. It was no easy journey : sometimes the horses were on the pavement and sometimes on the road ; sometimes the coachman lost his way altogether, and the cries of terrified foot-passengers and drivers did not tend to mitigate the alarm she felt. It was past six when she reached Princess Margaret Street. Her first words were :

'Dilston, my father has come home, hasn't he?'

'No, miss ; not yet,' was Dilston's answer.

Not yet ! when he had left the office so many hours before—when

he could have caught the Mansion House train and have gone straight to St. James's Park Station !

'Are you quite sure?' she asked, for she was so certain that the man must be wrong.

'Yes, miss; quite sure.'

She heard Dilston's reply, but he might be mistaken. She took a candle, and by the dim light the fog allowed it to give, tried to look in all the rooms where there was any chance of finding him; then she went to see if one of his hats was missing. Alas, one was ! And when she saw that, she sat down and wept bitterly. Nancy Davenport, who had stayed, and was now with her, tried to comfort her; but, for her own part, could not see that she had any particular cause for anxiety. Frank often did not come when she expected him, and still came safely home at last; but there was no comforting Katherine.

Hours went by—eight, nine, ten, eleven struck, and still Mr. Carey did not return. About twelve there was a loud ring at the bell, and with a beating heart Katherine herself ran to open the hall-door; but, bitter disappointment, it was Frank Davenport coming to seek his wife ! He had been wandering about for hours, losing his way more and more completely all the time. It was out of the question for the Davenports to return to their home that night; but when Frank said that he was resolved to go out in search of her father, who was sure to have taken refuge in some hotel, Katherine raised her head once more in hope. Danger or no danger, she could not bring herself to gainsay him.

'Where would you go?' she inquired.

'Oh, to the clubs, hotels, and friends' houses.' That was what he said, but his intention was to go to the hospitals. Out he went once more into the cold, dark fog; and as the door closed on him, the girls began to wonder whether it was possible to hope to see him back before morning.

Long before day dawned, the fog cleared away, the sky above shone fair and bright, and myriads of stars looked protectingly down on this world of ours below them, as if nothing would induce them to allow anything to go wrong in it. Davenport, tired and sick at heart with the suffering which this night of hospital-visiting was revealing to him, was in the meantime going from place to place, putting the same painful questions wherever he went. Nowhere could he learn anything of Mr. Carey. At last he resolved to go back to Princess Margaret Street for the chance of finding that the poor old gentleman had returned there. It was about eight in the morning when he came to this decision, and he was just walking down the wretched-looking street which led to the Charing-Cross Station of the Metropolitan Railway, when at some little distance he heard a sound which always produces a strange effect on the mind—the sound of men marching in step. He looked up in

sudden anxiety, but could see nothing but a small knot of people gathered about something which was being carried up the street. Soon he became aware that four solemn-looking men in dark blue were carrying a stretcher on their shoulders, on which lay a dreadful something which looked like a human body closely wrapped in tarpaulin. They pressed quickly and silently onwards, with a rustling sound like the rush of summer wind down a mountain pass. It was evident that the case was a hopeless one, by the way the tarpaulin was tied down over the face.

'Who is it? What is it?' asked Davenport, with only too sure a conviction that he already knew the answer.

'It's a gentleman they have just got out of the river,' replied a bystander.

'Dead?' said Davenport.

'Yes, dead enough. They say it's hours since he put himself into the water. They've had hard work to get him out.'

By this time the bearers, who had not halted a moment, were nearly at the top of the street. More anxious than ever, Davenport turned and followed them; he could not go to Princess Margaret Street until he had laid this doubt to rest. His apprehensions were only too well founded—Mr. Carey was dead, and had been dead even when Davenport first set out to look for him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'One doth not know
How much an ill word may empoison liking.'
Much Ado About Nothing.

CHILWORTH HALL, Co. Durham, was a house which few could behold without regret. It was grey and silvery with old age, and had been built when men knew how to build, and did their work ungrudgingly. It was large, well-planned, and delightful to live in; beautiful, too, and stately both within and without: but, unhappily, it was being rapidly surrounded by collieries, and the fine country in which it stood was as rapidly being transformed into a howling wilderness. There had been a time when, from the top of the hill on the slope of which the Hall was built, it had been rather a pretty task to search far away amid the blue haze for a group of chimneys which had established themselves at so thoroughly respectable a distance from Chilworth that they could not be distinguished in all weathers, and gave so little sign of their existence that the fragment of variety they introduced into the landscape could be admired without alloy. Some neighbour, too far away to be loved more warmly than is prescribed by the laws of Christian brotherhood, might perhaps be groaning under the presence of these chimneys; but even that was uncertain, for it was equally possible that he might hail each puff of smoke as a joy and a money-making

triumph. Now, alas ! there was no need to scale heights or to strain eyes to see such sights as this, for even from the stately old garden of the Hall itself the morning light was dimmed and the sunset splendour defiled by seven sister furnaces, large, united, and strong. And, as if this were not enough, chimneys reared their tall heads on all sides, puffs of jetty smoke concealed what had once been the very eye of the landscape—the entrance to a narrow valley—and year by year these unwelcome innovations crept nearer. Already, within three miles forces were at work which would do their utmost to poison everything in whose veins blood flowed or sap stirred. As yet this was the worst—no pit was actually at work nearer than this ; though, horrible as the fact was to the sensitive soul of Mrs. Wilbraham, the present owner, a dead and gone Wilbraham, grandfather of her late husband, had been ‘so lost to all sense of natural beauty, so miserably anxious to make himself rich, so indecently ready to avail himself of any chance of doing so,’ that he had acted on his conviction that coal was to be found on the Wilbraham estate, and had bored here, there, and everywhere in zealous determination to find it.

It had often been said that the very Hall itself was built on a rich coal-bed, and this Wilbraham of other days had so far respected this belief, that he had sunk shafts all round it. One was near the kitchen-garden, several in the wood beyond the flower-garden, some in the fields ; but though he bored in nearly thirty places, and though he assuredly did find what he was in search of, either it was not in sufficient quantity, or it could not be worked under ordinary conditions, and he had been forced to abandon his operations, leaving about thirty ugly punctures in his property to commemorate his futile efforts, not to speak of the ugly traces which remained in his account-books for many a long day afterwards.

Some of these pits which he had tried to make had been walled round, one or two of the deepest had been filled up, some railed in ; but, on the whole, the disappointed gentleman preferred to have them left open and yawning wide. They were all very near his house, he said, and everyone who had any business to be stirring about there knew exactly where they were. All honest people, too, took their walks abroad by day ; and as for poachers and people who went wandering about by night, they were just as well at the bottom of a pit as anywhere else. So the pits were left as long as he lived ; but some had since been filled, and kindly Nature herself had done much to obliterate the insult which had been put upon her.

The sea was a mile and a half from Chilworth, and a charming dene or hollow between two hills led gradually down to it from the garden. This garden went entirely round the house, but the prettiest and most important part of it lay between the house and the sea. It consisted of a large square, bounded on the front or seaward side by a sunk fence, which divided it from some highly picturesque

pasture-land which lay above the dene, and ran down in a line with it all the way to the shore. This square garden was for the most part laid out as a lawn, but it was dotted with flower-beds, and diversified by clumps of flowering shrubs, or sometimes even by a handsome forest-tree, for there was space enough for anything. On the left or north side of the lawn was a double row of very fine filbert-trees, and beyond and above them the high hill, on the slope of which the Hall was built. On the southern side of the lawn was a broad gravel-walk, with a wide border on each side of it filled to overflowing with old English flowers. Outside the garden, on this right side, the ground dipped very suddenly, and down below the tall hollyhocks and sunflowers of Mrs. Wilbraham's beloved English borders were to be seen the tops of oaks and elms and firs in the dene, which ran parallel with its whole length. The palmy days of the gardens were over ; but flowers, fruit and vegetables still did their best to repay the trouble spent on them, and make a brave fight against the evil influences of smoke, east winds, and the neighbourhood of the sea. If, however, no flower that was not hardy could be prevailed on to grow in the Hall-garden, the wild-flowers made ample amends for that the moment you were outside it. The steep hill above the house was almost always ablaze with gorse, broom, foxgloves, or heather ; and the dene, which began where the garden ended, was celebrated all over the county for the rarity and profusion of the flowers which grew in it. Its fame was so great that botanists and nurserymen would rapidly have rifled it, had Mrs. Wilbraham not stood on her rights and locked up her gates, especially that which opened on the seashore. Nothing, however, protected her property so effectually as a series of notices she caused to be put up to inform all trespassers that it was dangerous to quit the foot-path because of the still-open old coal-pits. She locked her gates, and henceforth her birds and beasts and flowers lived in peace.

The trees in the dene were nowhere very dense, so the hillside had bright raiment for every season ; its tender primrose-strewn garment for first and earliest wear, next its heavenly blue forget-me-not dress, and then its regal robe of wild hyacinths. And there were slopes where serried ranks of delicate lilac throatwort, or armies of foxgloves and thickets of honeysuckle and wild roses grew for ever unmolested by human hand. No one enjoyed these things more than Mrs. Wilbraham, widow of the son of the man who had so vainly sought for coal, mother of two sons, and aunt of one niece, who lived with her. This was Barbara Linley, the very girl who had taken lessons in cookery with Katherine Carey at South Kensington.

Barbara had then told Katherine that she lived with an aunt in the country, who had a very unfortunate way of not being able to

keep her servants ; and, for that reason, she herself was learning cookery, so as to be able to teach servants of the humbler kind.

Mrs. Wilbraham had not improved in this respect. She could not keep her servants. Singly they left her—in a body they left her ; but there was something about her which always ended in their going somehow. They did not understand her. She took a warm interest in driving ideas into their heads, which they had no desire to admit. She was motherly to parts of their bodies, which they looked on as of no account. They resented being told not to chip the enamel off their teeth by biting their thread when they were sewing, or not to kneel on hard floors without a mat. She was kind to them, but she worried them by being too kind. She was cross, but not in the right place. She let them alone sometimes ; but, when most successfully practising that treatment, she suddenly infringed some dearest right—as, for instance, sent her orders to the cook in writing for ten days, and then walked into the servants' hall just after their dinner, when they were whiling away an hour very pleasantly in rational conversation. Even this—even all else could have been pardoned if, when they were going quietly about their work, and doing their best to please her, she could have been content to leave them alone. She could not ; she was possessed of a raging desire to improve their mental and bodily condition. A quiet, well-conducted housemaid was often inflamed to fury by being made to quit her dust-pan and broom, and mount to the roof with Mrs. Wilbraham to see a wonderfully fine double rainbow, or kept waiting, when she took hot water to her mistress's room in the morning, to listen to a very curious dream the said mistress had just been aroused from, and then scolded an hour later for not having gone on with her work exactly the same.

'How could I light that fire, and dust the things, when I was listening for a good half-hour or more to what you were telling me, ma'am ?' said the aggrieved girl, in self-defence.

'Oh yes, you could. I don't expect you to do impossibilities, but I do expect you to do your ordinary common daily work ! I am not asking anything extra.'

'And isn't listening to your dreams quite extra ?' said the girl, and was at once dismissed for impertinence.

This is a specimen of the sweet unreasonableness which governed Mrs. Wilbraham's actions. She was erratic, unpunctual, and changeable ; but kind and anxious to do right, very clever, and singularly foolish. It would not have been easy to find a handsomer or sweeter-looking woman than she was at the age of sixty-six. She was unusually tall and well-built, by no means slender, but not stout, with the fine delicate complexion and clear blue eyes of eighteen. Her hair was still of a soft warm brown ; but its youth did not profit it, for she wore it drawn back from her face, and tucked away under a close-fitting plain cap, almost entirely un-

trimmed, but with a border of soft, plaited tulle. The Quaker-like plainness of this cap suited Mrs. Wilbraham's delicate and refined beauty to perfection. Her dress was just as plain. It was always of some dark, rich colour, and of the richest materials ; but always entirely untrimmed. A housekeeper would not have worn it : she would have thought it quite inadequate to the representation of her rank ; but Mrs. Wilbraham looked a duchess in it ! One strange thing about that lady was that, even when treating those about her most unkindly and rudely, she still looked so affectionate, refined, and scrupulously delicate, that it was difficult for them to trust to the evidence of their own senses. She did more than look these things, however—she felt them. It was equally strange, too, that, in spite of the apparent strength of her bodily frame, and the judgment she displayed on some points, she was as timid as a mouse in the presence of physical danger, and in abject bondage to certain superstitious fears.

Of Mrs. Wilbraham's two sons, Coventry, the elder, had succeeded to the estates of a maternal uncle, and had taken the name of Carew. He lived on his own property in Northumberland. The second, Wentworth, much less handsome, clever, and attractive in every way, was dependent on his mother ; and it was understood to be her wish that he should marry his cousin Barbara.

Barbara, pretty and portionless, knew of this scheme, but had as yet not given in her adhesion to it. She was the mainstay of the house. In a domestic crisis, hers was the only head which could be relied on—hers the only hands which could do one stroke of useful work.

'I've just been thinking, Barbara,' said Mrs. Wilbraham one morning after a long silence, and when Mrs. Wilbraham began a speech in that way it boded no good. It did not alarm Barbara, however, for she was thinking too, and did not hear. 'You are not listening, Barbara !'

'Do what, did you say, aunt ?' inquired Barbara, whose life was so made up of ready activity that, whenever anything was said by her aunt which she did not happen to hear, she always assumed that it was an order implying exertion.

'Do nothing ! Sit still. You are rather a muddled-minded girl, my dear !'

'I know I am,' said poor Barbara. 'I think I sit too much over my needlework. Perhaps that's what makes me so absent !'

Perhaps indeed. Dornröschen fell into a sleep which lasted a century, from the wounds inflicted by her spindle ; and how many other women have fallen into a state of drowsiness, which has lasted their whole lives, simply from doing nothing more interesting than prick their fingers while stitching away vacantly at dull white articles of clothing ?

'I've just been thinking,' again said Mrs. Wilbraham,

Barbara smiled faintly. She foresaw trouble.

'What about, aunt?' she asked drearily.

'About that delightful story of Tieck's, "*Des Lebens Ueberflüss;*" and I quite agree with it. We could do without almost every one of the things we make such a fuss about. I have been wondering whether it would not be much wiser to dismiss all the servants but two, and just live in half a dozen rooms. The more servants you have, the more trouble you have!'

Mrs. Wilbraham had for many years steadily acted on this principle. When her husband died, sixteen men and women ran their daily stage of duty at Chilworth Hall. She had begun by dismissing all the menservants but those who lived out of the house. Then the housekeeper was sent away, after which she gradually cut off the heads of the tallest poppies, as she expressed it—that is, sent away her maids two by two until she had reduced her establishment to four women. Every time she reduced her staff, she shut up a certain number of rooms so as to diminish the work in proportion; and now, she, her son and niece did not occupy more of the Hall than one wing. This morning Mrs. Wilbraham had been thinking that it would be a blissful change to get rid of the kitchen-maid and parlour-maid, and make two servants do the entire work.

'I shall then,' said she, 'have only two ill-tempered women to cope with instead of four. What do you think of it, Barbara?'

'I am sure I don't know,' said Barbara, who felt very sure that it would not do, but was afraid to say so until her aunt had exhausted her subject, for she knew that she would not be satisfied otherwise.

'Barbara, my darling, you never do know. You are just like St. Bernard. If anyone went to him in a state of uncertainty, he was sure to return more uncertain still. Abelard said that.'

'Oh, if you are uncertain,' said Barbara, quite regardless of Abelard, not to speak of St. Bernard, 'I am sure it won't do. They will say that there is too much work, and leave us, and they would be right!'

'We can shut up more rooms; we could do without the breakfast-room, and live in the library; anything is better than having unsympathetic people in the house. The sight of them frets me!'

'Think about it a little longer,' urged Barbara, who was afraid she saw a gleam of purpose in her aunt's eyes.

'I will—I'll say nothing yet, but I've almost made up my mind. Now I'll go and order dinner, and pay them their month's wages.'

Mrs. Wilbraham always paid her servants' wages monthly, and all on the same day. Half-way upstairs she overtook the housemaid, who was studiously reading a small manual as she went on her way to some scene of duty. Mrs. Wilbraham generally encouraged her maids to read, but prescribed standard authors, not tracts, and this looked suspiciously like a tract, and besides that, the girl wore the aspect of a martyr.

'Here are your wages for the month, Eliza, and I want to know what you are reading,' said she sternly.

'I am not reading, ma'am. I am just looking at a book Lady Ulverston gave me when I left her—only while I am going upstairs, ma'am.'

'I'd like to see what it is,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, whose sight, however, was so bad that the girl felt very safe, when, rather against her will, the book was taken from her hand. But Mrs. Wilbraham went back to Barbara. 'What is this?' said she, putting her finger on the page Eliza had been reading.

'"How to serve the froward,"' read Barbara. 'Why, it is a book full of good advice to servants—how to serve froward mistresses, I suppose. The girls are to murmur prayers and not mind what is said to them, and the rest of the book is full of hints about dress and things of that kind.'

'I don't want to know anything except what is on the page I showed you, and even I can see that it is the best thumbed of all. I am the froward, I suppose!'

As Mrs. Wilbraham said this her delicate wax-like cheeks flushed, and her mild eyes were turned up in gentle wonder.

'Well, I won't have people murmuring prayers and not attending to what I say! Eliza, come here. Listen. You shall leave my house to-morrow morning at noon, the hour when your month expires, unless you at once tear that page out of your book, and put it into the fire.'

'Oh no,' replied Eliza, 'I'm not going to tear any pages out of my book! Lady Ulverston gave it to me, and I mean to take care of it, but I am quite ready to leave you, ma'am, if you wish it.'

'I do then,' said Mrs. Wilbraham kindly; 'you shall go this day month;' and the girl retreated without another word.

'It is very humiliating to a person of independent spirit to see how much they think of a countess!' observed Mrs. Wilbraham. 'She would have torn that page out of the book in a moment if Lady Ulverston had not given it! Silly girl! I would have given her a far better book, and she is perhaps not aware that I might have been a countess myself, if I had liked.'

'Might you, aunt? Might you really?' asked Barbara, somewhat incredulously, for Mrs. Wilbraham was referring to a portion of her own early history, with respect to which she was accustomed to build up a theory on what most people would have thought wholly insufficient grounds.

'Yes, of course I might, if I had only consented to marry Mr. Delamere; he did marry a countess afterwards, you know.'

This was a curious inversion of reasoning with which Barbara was already familiar, and she listened in respectful silence.

After this Mrs. Wilbraham went to her kitchen, paid her tradesmen's books, paid the servants' wages, and tried to be pleasant to

them, for if one young woman was going to serve the froward elsewhere, that was no reason why more should do so. She had already changed her mind about keeping fewer servants—for some things she almost wished to keep more. She beat about in her brains for some advice to please those she had, and characteristically hit upon this :

‘Cook,’ said she, ‘I’ve been thinking.’

‘Well, ma’am,’ said cook deferentially.

‘I’ve been thinking that when warm weather comes it will be very pleasant for all of us, if my niece and I and my son take our meals in the open air.’

‘It will be pleasant if you like it, ma’am, but I’m afraid it will make a great deal of work for the servants.’

‘Yes ; but what delightful work ! They will smell the flowers, and hear the birds singing while they are doing it.’

‘H’m. They don’t care a deal about flowers, ma’am.’

‘But I want to make them do so. Why shouldn’t they care about flowers ?’

‘There’s no last whatever in flowers, ma’am !’

‘And the birds——’

‘Nasty hurrying things ! They build their nests right anunder my window, and I never get my night’s rest ! They rouse me up at cock-crow !’

‘How delicious ! I wish I heard them ! Cook, sometimes when you are awake early like that, I do wish you would come and rouse me up—I mean if there is a fine sunrise. Half the beauty of this world is lost by us when we are in bed.’

The cook sniffed indignantly—her lady was going too far. To her mind, too, the very fact of people going to bed showed they meant to lose all knowledge of what was passing while they were there ; so it was unreasonable to lament such losses.

‘Please, ma’am, may I go out to-night for an hour or two ?’ said the kitchen-maid, suddenly appearing.

‘But, my good girl, you came to me with the very same request only four days ago ! You seem to me to be always going out !’

‘Oh no, ma’am. I asked, I know, but it was so wet—you yourself met me in the hall, and said you thought I had perhaps better stay in.’

‘Oh, did I ? But you would have gone out, you know, if you had been able ; so it comes to much the same thing. Well, you may go.’

Leave was given, but offence was given also. Mrs. Wilbraham was quite unaware of it ; back she went, full of pleasure at having conciliated her servants. Presently came the parlour-maid to perform some ministration. She wore a stiffly starched dress, which grated against the floor, or when not doing that produced a sound like a main-sail in a high wind.

‘Mary!’ cried Mrs. Wilbraham, ‘I wish you would not have your dresses starched so. Listen to the noise you make; and it doesn’t look well either. Why will women make such frights of themselves? Greek women, who were models of beauty, never dressed so as to make themselves look like decanters and water-bottles. You should dress like them.’

‘It means taking off and not putting on, if you want your servants like those half-dressed stalties in the hall,’ said Mary, who was cross because Eliza was going away.

‘I want you dressed for domestic service, but as gracefully as possible, preserving the lines of the figure. Get that book at the corner of the third shelf of the book-case, and I’ll find the place, and you shall read me what Stubbs says about starch, and he wrote three hundred years ago.’

Mary excused herself, and tried to get on with her work; but Mrs. Wilbraham put on two pairs of spectacles, and then, with the assistance of an eye-glass, read to the unwilling girl a passage wherein the author speaks of this ‘liquid matter which they call starch, wherein the devil has learned them to wash and dive their ruffs, which, being dry, will then stand off stiff and inflexible about their necks.’

‘Do you understand that, Mary?’ asked Mrs. Wilbraham. ‘Is it quite clear?’

‘Yes, ma’am. I don’t think that there is much to understand, except that he blamed the devil for stiffening the ruffs and things worn by ladies. But then, perhaps, the ladies thought the devil stiffened his pen when he wrote so rude!’

‘Mary, you are rather a clever girl!’ said Mrs. Wilbraham admiringly. ‘That’s ingenious!’

‘It’s not cleverness we ought to look to or value,’ said Mary drearily; then she added, in a more cheerful voice: ‘Please, ma’am, I was just wanting to ask you if you could make it convenient to let me go out every Wednesday evening?’

‘Every Wednesday! But our dinner?’

‘Eliza will wait that night, ma’am; leastways, as long as she’s here. I’m not asking it for a regular thing—at least, I hope not. This is how it is: I attend the Paradise Chapel, at Larpool, ma’am, and the minister there he says my soul is just in that state that I must go more constant. He told me last week it was just dangling, as it might be, betwixt heaven and hell; and I must try to do something to save myself.’

‘Don’t believe all the rubbish these men tell you!’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, whose artistic sense was deplorably offended by the picture.

‘Oh, but I do believe it; and it’s not pleasant to think of; and I must have liberty to do the best I can for myself.’

‘I don’t see how I can say yes to such a request as that,’ said

Mrs. Wilbraham. 'I don't see my way at all! It would be most inconvenient; however, I'll think about it, and let you know. Dangling, indeed!' she muttered, when the girl was gone. 'I'll not let her go. I would have told her to go to my church, if I didn't know that it's impossible for her to get any good from listening to that man!'

'That man' was the Rector of Chilworth, to whose church Mrs. Wilbraham had for some time steadily refused to go. He had built himself a capacious new rectory, but had placed it so that it completely ruined one of the finest views in the neighbourhood.

'A man dead to beauty can't be alive to religion,' observed Mrs. Wilbraham, and forsook his ministrations.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'To-morrow shall you know our mind at full.'

King Henry V.

'The moon shines fair, you may away by night.'

King Henry IV.

PERHAPS it was that conversation with her cook which had made Mrs. Wilbraham so wakeful; certain it is, that the morning after it took place, she was, for once, not asleep at sunrise, and, perceiving a strange light on the walls of her room, sprang out of bed as lightly as sixty-six years would allow, in haste to see more. Her eyes were dim, but they must have been dim indeed not to let her see something of the flood of rosy light which overspread the entire sky. She drew one quick breath of delight, for, with her, love of beauty was a passion, and stood marvelling at all before her, especially at two or three utterly commonplace out-buildings with rather high-pitched roofs. They were built on a hill on the other side of the dene. By day they were even ugly: now they stood up against the gorgeously tinted sky, dark, mysterious, and solemn; it would have been hard to find anything more picturesque. Suddenly she remembered Barbara, who always slept in the adjoining bedroom for the sake of being within call. How selfish not to have thought of her before! At once Mrs. Wilbraham hurried to the next room, and drew the poor sleepy girl out of bed to share her pleasure.

'Come, darling! Come quickly; you might wait a quarter of a century and not see anything so fine as this!'

'You will catch cold, aunt!' said Barbara, when sufficiently awake to observe that her enthusiastic aunt was standing almost barefooted, and with nothing but a shawl thrown over her night-dress.

'Yes, I've no doubt I shall; but then it is quite worth while. I wouldn't mind having fifty colds for the sake of seeing a sky like that! Don't you think we ought to get the servants up to have a look?'

‘Oh no ; don’t disturb them—they are tired.’

‘Well, as you like. But I’d never forgive anyone who let me lie in bed when such a sight as this was to be seen ! Child, you are losing everything for the sake of wrapping me up ! I’m warm enough, I assure you. Oh dear, dear ! I don’t see it half so well now that the red is beginning to go away ! It’s very hard to be so blind !’

The red was followed by tints of ravishing delicacy and the strangest brilliancy. Barbara watched in delight ; again Mrs. Wilbraham sighed, and Barbara could see how she was grieving over the loss of her sight, which had been failing for years, but had of late grown rapidly worse.

‘How I wish you could see as much as I do !’ said Barbara.

‘So do I ! Well, it can’t be helped ; and I have seen what will make me happy all day,’ replied her aunt, with a sigh of content. ‘Thank God for writing such messages to us on the sky night and morning. I can’t understand how people can let base thoughts enter their minds when such spectacles are set before them ! Now, it is all over.’

It was by no means over, but the poor lady was too blind to see the subtle radiance of what succeeded, and Barbara did not like to undeceive her. Besides, her teeth were chattering with cold ; so, tenderly but firmly, Barbara led her back to bed.

‘We really ought to have made the servants get up to take a look ; poor things, they would have enjoyed it ! It’s unkind of us.’

‘Oh no, dear, they wouldn’t have cared about it ; never mind them. Try to go to sleep again, aunt ; you will be so tired ! Had you not better breakfast in bed, as your rest has been so broken ?’

Mrs. Wilbraham assented, Barbara kissed her and went away to try to get a little more rest herself. She slept too long, however, and did not awake until eight o’clock. Full of penitence and fear lest her aunt should be waiting for her breakfast, she dressed as quickly as possible, hurried downstairs, and entered the breakfast-room, but to her amazement found it just as it had been left the night before. The lamps were still there, the books and papers she had been reading to her aunt were lying in confusion, the grate was full of burnt-out coals, the shutters still shut, and a thick coating of dust was visibly lying on every smooth surface.

‘I must have made a mistake when I looked at my watch,’ thought Barbara. ‘It can’t have been eight, it must have been six.’ But a little clock on the mantel-piece said it was now twenty-five minutes to nine, and Barbara, unable to understand why Eliza was neglecting her duties so disgracefully, rang the bell, and went to the door to meet her as she came with her explanations and excuses. ‘She may have been told that we would breakfast in the library,’ thought Barbara while waiting, but the library was in the same state as the breakfast-room—dark with closed shutters, and grey

with a long night's dust. The hall shutters were shut likewise; she had not noticed that before, and the hall-door was still barred and bolted. 'How very odd! The servants must have overslept themselves too,' thought she, 'I only hope my aunt has done the same. Cook is sure to be up, for she is always early, that's one good thing!'

The house seemed strangely quiet—no sound was to be heard anywhere. She stood listening for some moments, but soon the sense of utter stillness grew so oppressive to her that she could not bear to remain where she was any longer, but hurried off to speak to the cook, almost expecting to find what she did find, a fireless hearth and an empty kitchen. Without another moment's delay, she ran upstairs to the servants' rooms. All were in complete disorder; the beds had been slept in, but the servants and the servants' boxes and belongings were gone, and it at once became clear that they had all disappeared in the night. How had they contrived to accomplish their flight so silently and so successfully? Their rooms were far away from those of Barbara and her aunt, but how had all those boxes been carried away? What was she to do? That was the next thought—she, a stupid girl of nineteen, who had never lighted a fire or boiled a kettie in her life. Alas, for the gas-stoves of South Kensington! Alas, for many other appliances there to be found! Perhaps, after all, those servants were not gone! Again she went downstairs, hoping to hear the rustling of stiffly-starched dresses, the smart blows of the housemaid's broom against frail but valuable articles of furniture, the crash of opening shutters. Any of the sounds of which she was accustomed to hear her aunt complain, would now have been most grateful to her ears; but no servant was there, and as Barbara stood in the large desolate kitchen, which looked full of work too hard for human hands to do, she felt ready to sit down and cry. 'If I had one fire lighted, I need not mind the kitchen,' was her next thought. 'I'll light one in the breakfast-room, and boil the kettle there; everything we want for breakfast must be in the larder.' She lighted her fire, dusted the room, put her kettle on the fire, and soon got her aunt's breakfast ready.

'How quiet you have kept the house for me, dear,' was Mrs. Wilbraham's remark as Barbara and her tray arrived. 'Thanks to your kind care I have had such a delightful sleep. Why, it's ten o'clock!'

'I know! I am very sorry! All the servants have left in the night! I've had to light the fire and do everything! Here is a note I found in the kitchen, perhaps it is from them.'

'The wretches! All gone! Not really? Read their letter.'

'DEAR MADAM,—

'We have desided to quit your house and service at once, and trust you will soon be able to suit yourself again. We all of us

think if you could manage to be less fancical, there would be a better chance of your doing it. We know that we are leaving our sittivations rather of a sudden, and that you may say we are acting unregular, and make up your mind to do all you can to punish us, but an exposure will come worse for you than for us, and we warn you of that, and then you can please yourself what you will do.

‘HANNAH SMITH.

‘MARY HESLOP.

‘ELIZA CRUDDAS.

‘JESSIE CLARK.’

‘How very funny!’ said Mrs. Wilbraham.

Barbara, who was thoroughly tired with the excitement and distress she had undergone, was so annoyed with her aunt for not at once breaking out into exclamations at the impertinence of this letter, that she could scarcely hide her feelings, but all that Mrs. Wilbraham said when remonstrated with, was, ‘That’s a genuine expression of opinion! It is so seldom that servants let you see anything but mere conventional assent or dissent, when you give an order.’

‘But are not you vexed with them? You seem to take it so quietly!’

‘Why shouldn’t I? We can get others. Their opinion is of no importance to me! I wish Mary had stayed though, there was something in her. Don’t look so tragic, Barbara; I know their going is a nuisance, but still it has its comical side. Crying? I do believe you are! That’s too silly! We shall soon get four new girls to run about the house and think they are doing our work. How did you feel when you found they were really gone?’

‘Miserable! Helpless! As if it required perfectly gigantic ability to light a fire, and get breakfast ready.’

‘I dare say you did; and yet you could have written a long letter in a few minutes, and most likely this scrawl, left by the fugitives, cost them a thousand times more trouble than all the work they have done for weeks. Crying again! Do be calm, Barbara: I am taking it calmly. We will drive over to Donnington as soon as I am up, and bring back some new women to worry us. Don’t forget that we have plenty of carriages and money, and nothing to do but supply ourselves with what we want. Go and get your breakfast, unless you have had it already, and remember the proverb, “On peut bien changer un borgne pour un boiteux.”’

The gardener’s wife came, and offered to make herself useful. She ‘knew the girls had took off.’ She had seen the young man who had carried their boxes away in his cart to the station. She and the coachman’s wife came to do the work, and Barbara went to Donnington, and to various registry-offices, where she was shown

into rooms to ask questions of young women, who were, on the contrary, firmly resolved to ask questions of her. Being wholly inexperienced, she was for a while over-mastered by their determination. 'How many polished floors have I to keep in order?' 'How many steps are there from the bottom to the top of your house?' 'How long did your last housemaid stay?' 'And the one before her, how long did she stay?' Such were the inquiries which Barbara had to answer; but when she was asked 'if Mrs. Wilbraham provided toughened glass, for it was such a harass to a servant's feelings when things would go and break themselves?' she plucked up courage, and put an abrupt end to the unpromising interview, saw more and more women, and at last tremblingly engaged three, two who were to go back with her, and another to follow next day. One of those who accompanied her was of the dull, honest kind; the other of the motherly-widow type.

It was with no great sense of triumph that Barbara went home; yet a motherly widow is a comfortable thing in a house, and honest good-will is a quality by no means to be despised in a housemaid. She shut her eyes to rest, and repeated this to herself; but when she once more opened them, she was shocked to find that the motherly woman did not look half so pleasant as before, and had, indeed, all but assumed the uncompromising aspect of the typical workhouse-matron. Her very features seemed to have hardened and stiffened into wooden self-assertion.

Barbara turned to the dull, honest, good girl; but she, on the contrary, having obtained the object of her desire—a place—had relaxed all effort to please, and did not even take the trouble to look ordinarily intelligent, but sat huddled up limply in the corner of the carriage, into which she had dropped, staring vaguely before her with vacant eyes and parted lips.

'We are entirely without servants, cook. You will do your best to help us?' said Barbara, hoping for a recapitulation of the good intentions she had heard with such pleasure a short while before.

'I dare say I will,' replied cook stolidly.

'You said you had not been accustomed to have a kitchen-maid under you?' observed Barbara, who was secretly afraid that her aunt was making a great mistake in suddenly resolving to dispense with that functionary.

Cook turned her eyes on Barbara, but did not otherwise move a muscle. Barbara repeated her speech.

'You told me before there was no kitchen-maid,' was cook's quiet remark.

'I said my aunt had always kept a kitchen-maid, but had come to the conclusion that she would be more comfortable without one; but you told me that you had not been used to one.'

'Oh, did I? Well, I dare say I did; and no more I never have.'

'You are not afraid of the work?'

‘What work?’

‘Oh, what cooks usually have to do, of course; and cleaning your kitchens yourself, and so on!’

‘I? Oh, dear no! I dare say the work will get done somehow.’

‘Is that your parlour-maid, dear child?’ asked Mrs. Wilbraham, during an interval of rest from the sight of a cumbrous young person rolling round the dining-room table much in the fashion of a man running a race while tied up in a sack.

‘I’m dreadfully sorry,’ murmured Barbara; ‘I had very little choice. The housemaid is better; she will be here to-morrow.’

Next morning, when breakfast-time came, there seemed to be some difficulty in getting that meal. They rang, and every time they did so, Dorothy, the parlour-maid, appeared; but all she said was, ‘In a minute, ma’am. It’s coming.’ But it did not come; and, at last, Barbara, perforce, went to the kitchen, and found poor Dorothy doing her best to broil some bacon on a fire which had just been lighted.

‘But where is cook?’ said Barbara.

‘Not down yet,’ said Dorothy, with head bent over her task. ‘I went to her door and called her when I came down myself, but she said there was no great hurry.’

‘No hurry! Not down yet! It is half-past eight o’clock; and it is not your work to prepare breakfast!’

At this moment cook entered the kitchen with long strides, and a calm expression of countenance. She was even prepared to say ‘Good-morning!’ pleasantly to Miss Linley; but that young lady endeavoured to put her to shame by the severity of her tone, as she said:

‘Pray inform me what this means?’

‘What this means?’ said cook, dropping into a chair in the middle of the kitchen, and looking benevolently at Dorothy and her frying-pan as one who saw from afar probable benefit to herself from such exertions.

‘I want to know why you are not downstairs doing your own work? It is not Dorothy’s business to get breakfast ready; and half-past eight is no time for you to come down. Did I not tell you that you would have to be downstairs every morning at half-past six?’

‘Well, yes, you did; but then I’m sure I thought it was only a threat!’

‘Only a threat! How absurdly you talk! How is your work to be done if you lie in bed? Dorothy has lighted your fire, and done your work to-day, but you must do it yourself to-morrow.’

Cook looked puzzled—not disagreeable or cross, but puzzled.

‘Breakfast has to be ready by half-past eight,’ repeated Barbara.

‘Did I not say so?’

‘Yes; but then I thought that was a threat too. Half-past eight is very early.’

‘You will make me very angry if you talk so foolishly ! Thanks to Dorothy, we can have our breakfast. I will go away and leave you to have yours. You had better be quick, for my aunt will come into the kitchen to order dinner, and if she sees things in this state, she will not be pleased. You will try, won’t you ?’ added Barbara soothingly, for she had spoken much more crossly than she liked.

Before breakfast was over, the postman brought some letters. One from Mrs. Wilbraham’s youngest son, announcing his speedy return. One from the housemaid, who was expected that day, to say that, on further consideration, she begged to decline the situation, which, being interpreted, meant that she had heard a bad report of it. A third from Nancy Davenport, with whom Barbara had become very friendly during a visit she and her aunt had paid to Coventry Carew in Northumberland.

‘What do you think, aunt ?’ she exclaimed. ‘That beautiful Miss Carey—that lovely girl Mr. Davenport painted—has become so poor that she actually wants a place of some kind. She hasn’t a penny in the world, Nancy says. She has been staying with the Davenports for months.’

‘A very pleasant house to stay in, I’m sure.’

‘But Miss Carey has not been staying there for pleasure ; she has been ill, and has lost her father and mother, and I don’t know what besides. Stay, I’ll read you Nancy’s letter—at least, some of it. “Can you hear of a situation likely to suit a dear friend of mine—Miss Carey ? You have seen her yourself in her happier days, when no girl was ever more tenderly cared for or loved. Up to the age of nineteen, she had the full enjoyment of every one of this world’s best gifts, and then, almost in a moment, everything was taken from her. She was engaged to the only son of her father’s partner—her engagement was broken off ; her mother, one of the sweetest women I ever saw, died ; her good, kind father was ruined, and in his misery he either drowned himself, or lost his way in a thick fog and fell into the river. We all fear that he drowned himself, but God alone knows the truth. All these misfortunes came on Katherine at once. Everyone who loved her was torn from her—her home was broken up, and all had to be sold. Frank and I, who were a great deal with her during the worst part of the time, took her home with us, and did all we could for her ; but you can readily understand what a state the poor girl was in. At first she was very ill, now she is calm, and accepts her sad lot as a punishment for having deceived her father. Perhaps I ought not to be so communicative, but I believe ruin came on her family because she found that there was some one whom she loved better than she loved the young man to whom she was engaged, and she was not quite open and honourable about it. I dare say, however, she blames herself more than she ought—anyhow, she is penitent

and most miserable. She says she has killed her father, and I foresee that the only comfort she can ever know now, will be in living a life of expiation. She will never win her own forgiveness until she has gone through some martyrdom of pain and renunciation. She has steadily refused to see the man whose love has cost her so dear. I know she will love him for ever, but I am sure that she will never think it right to marry him. I think she is right. She would be reminded of her poor father's fate every time she looked at her husband. She refuses to teach, or to do any of the light work indigent ladies usually prefer. She wishes for hard and active work. She says if she has much time to think, she will break her heart, and that without constant employment she will go mad. Try to hear of something for her. In time she will be a very valuable person in a house, I can see that, for since she has been with us, she has insisted on helping me, and has done so in all kinds of ways. Get her a situation as lady-help, if you can—that's what she wants. There is little sign of the deep sorrow she is feeling—she thinks it her duty to seem cheerful, and succeeds wonderfully; only I, who know, can see what she is suffering. I am looking out among my friends for a place for her, and have no doubt I shall soon succeed."

'Of course she will,' interrupted Mrs. Wilbraham; 'Miss Carey will soon be picked up. Let me go to my kitchen and order dinner.'

'Let me do it to-day,' said Barbara, who was afraid her aunt might see much amiss.

Mrs. Wilbraham assented, and Barbara went and gave her orders for the day.

'That was a tidy woman we had here yesterday,' said cook meditatively, 'she worked well, miss, couldn't she come and help a little to-day?'

'No, she only came as a favour; she's the gardener's wife, but I am sure you will be able to manage; come, it only wants a beginning.'

'I'll begin when the fire burns up, miss. You get very bad coals here!'

Very unhopefully Barbara departed. Two hours later she met Dorothy going to and fro, and asked how cook was getting on.

'She's getting on very well with swearing at the bad coals, miss!'

'Swearing?'

'Yes, swearing. She's a powerful swearer, if she's nothing else.'

Barbara made three steps towards the kitchen. Dorothy caught hold of her arm.

'Miss Barbara,' cried she, 'don't go and say I said anything; she'll murder me if you do.'

'Murder you?'

'Yes, murder me, and you too; a great strong man like that could murder all us women, and get away before anyone knew!'

'Great strong man! Dorothy, have you lost your wits?'

'She's a man, I'm convinced of it; and, what's more, she's in the militia!'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Barbara, much relieved, for that was too silly to be true.

'It's not nonsense, miss. What does she want with red regimentals in her box, if it is not to wear them? She's a man, I'm sure. Can't you see how she strides about the place? She has either got into some trouble and wants to hide herself, or she is out of her mind.'

'How do you know what she has in her box?' asked Barbara, who was beginning to feel rather uncomfortable.

'I jealoused something because she was so particular how it was carried upstairs; so when she was sitting like as if glued to her chair this morning, I went quickly to her room, opened the box-lid, and saw her red coat lying at the very top.'

Again Barbara made three steps towards the kitchen.

'Miss Barbara, if you say anything to this woman, I warn you I'll leave the house in half-an-hour. It's not safe!'

Barbara smiled. Under the influence of excitement this heavy lump of a Dorothy had become alert and clever; but then it would be an expensive process to keep such a cook as was now in the kitchen, merely to give a fillip to a housemaid's mental condition.

She went to her own room, and stayed for some time, wondering what she had better do. When she opened the door to go down, the sight which met her eyes was this: the cook, tall, powerful, and erect, with firm but entirely benevolent countenance, was slowly descending the front stairs, dressed for departure, and with a very heavy box on her back, which she seemed to regard as a light tourist's case!

'I seem to think I am not giving satisfaction, miss,' said she, 'so the best thing I can do is to leave. I'll wish you a very good morning, miss. I have no complaint to make of you.'

Barbara was too much amazed to speak, and stood watching her go. Then she ran to tell Mrs. Wilbraham what had happened, but that lady was composing a letter which she wished to dictate to Barbara, and feeling a fine flow of composition, would not listen to sordid cares.

'Sit down, dear Barbara,' said she. 'Don't talk to me about cooks! We will get more of them to-morrow! Sit down, I want to write a letter.'

Barbara took pen and paper, and to her surprise heard her aunt say:

'Write, "Dear Mrs. Davenport."' Then she proceeded to give a very long and vivid description of the sun-rise of the morning

before, hoping that Mr. Davenport might be able to paint from it. After this she made a new departure, and dictated :

“My dear young friend, your letters excite my astonishment ; they are always free from complaints. Is life easier in town than here ? We who live here in the country find that at the present prices, life is rapidly becoming an almost impossible luxury, and that servants are as scarce as poets. This brings me to the subject of my letter. In one from you to my niece, received this morning, you say that you have a young friend in the house with you who wants a situation as lady-help. Send her to me. Here her beauty and refinement will be singularly appreciated. Here, too, if she will but relieve me of some portion of the supervision which usually falls to my lot, penance will not be wanting. Here we will make her welcome, pay her what salary she asks, and let her choose what work she will do. Perhaps if you could send me two lady-helps, and I had two rough girls under them, I might know a peace to which I have been a stranger for years.”

At this point Mrs. Wilbraham paused to take in a new stock of ideas, or perhaps to consider whether she had not better double the order.

‘Are you really going to do this ?’ asked Barbara, who feared that, as usual, her aunt was proceeding too fast.

‘I am. I’d give anything to see comely, reasonable gentle-folks going about my house instead of the headless, heartless, thankless, blundering, noisy, destructive creatures we have had to endure so long. Under such circumstances life would be worth living ; it has for many years been a daily degradation to me. Let us get the letter finished and sent off. Write this :

“If Miss Carey is willing to come here, ask her to start at once, and, by-the-bye, as she possibly has stores of things from her old home which want house-room, tell her that she can have as much as she likes here, for no less than fourteen of my rooms are shut up to save trouble and worry. Let me hear from you soon.

“Yours ever sincerely,

“HESTER WILBRAHAM.”

‘She will come !’ cried Mrs. Wilbraham triumphantly ; ‘but she can’t be here for three or four days.’

‘Then we shall have time to change all our servants again, at least twice,’ sighed the despondent Barbara.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Eug. I have not smiled
These ten months ; if a sigh will please you,
I can afford enough to break your heart.

Old Play.

'I would give you some violets ; but they withered all, when my father died.'
Hamlet.

KATHERINE CAREY decided to accept Mrs. Wilbraham's offer. Many reasons induced her to do so. She wanted to do something to earn her living. She longed to put a great gulf between herself and every chance of ever seeing Lewis Barrington. She knew that the Davenports were now extremely poor, and feared that it must strain their slender resources even to give a home to her ; and, more important still, there was every reason to believe that whosoever served Mrs. Wilbraham would not lack occasions for acquiring a broken and contrite spirit. Strong in this conviction, she bade her dear friend Nancy write to that lady and say that she accepted gratefully, and would do her best to be useful. She begged Nancy to ask them all to take very little notice of her until the strangeness of her new life had worn off.

She was now in her own room, packing, the Davenports imagined ; but in reality she was thinking, and thinking hard. In spite, however, of all that had occurred during the last twelve months, in spite of the changed life which lay before her, Katherine's thoughts were given to the Davenports and to their troubles, and not to her own. The ray of good fortune which had beamed on them had done little more than show them how delightful such rays were, and had then retreated behind its cloud again, leaving them out in the cold. Frank had counted on a perennial glow, had bought two or three pretty bits of old furniture ; had, as he termed it, let Nancy have a good large sum to spend on her own pleasures—adding, with a tender scoff when he gave it to her, that he was quite sure it would all go in paying bills. It had gone in paying bills, as poor Nancy's money invariably did, and she had caught a bad cough by trying to make a somewhat aged Liberty silk afford protection against a long course of east winds. Frank's pictures were not selling—not that he had painted many, for so necessary is encouragement to the artistic temperament, that the fact of pictures not selling acted as a check on production. He never knew how terribly the strain of poverty told on Nancy. Indeed, living as he did in his studio from morning till night, he hardly perceived that there was any strain. He was always comfortable, for at the cost of any and every sacrifice to herself she made him so. If they were servantless, she filled the gap ; and poor Frank, full of his work and love for her, kissed her and said :

‘How delightful it is to see one’s own dear wife coming into the room instead of some horrible servant!’

And who so happy as Nancy as she stole away to dwell on such words as these? Even where food was concerned, he never observed what a difference want of money made. There was always some little extra thing for him which he enjoyed, while Nancy helped herself to something plainer; and he watched her, and wondered why women never seemed to care what they ate. Katherine had seen all this with growing uneasiness and pain. She was afraid that Nancy would kill herself rather than allow her husband to be fretted by the consequence of their ill fortune. She had remonstrated, but could obtain from her nothing but a bright smile and a prompt declaration that Frank was a darling, and the greatest pleasure she had was to run about and work for him. Once Katherine spoke to Frank himself, but all that he said was:

‘Oh, Nancy does not care how she lives, so long as she knows she is helping me to paint good pictures! She knows what art is, and that artists’ minds must be kept easy.’

‘But, dear Frank, your mind wouldn’t be easy if she became ill; and if you don’t look after her she will!’

‘Katherine,’ said he, ‘you may trust me. I love her more than anything else in the world. How can I show it more than I do? I think you are exaggerating. After all, if she does run about after me, it is not as if she had anything else to do. You make me miserable if you say she is ill. I couldn’t live without her.’

The little things Katherine had to warn him against seemed too sordid and disagreeable to name to a man who could speak in this way—especially when she knew that he was speaking as he felt; and yet these little things were such great things, and he was so blind to their existence and importance. She had not dared to press him further. It was impossible to say to him, ‘Then if you love her, don’t be so fearfully selfish about small things!’ for that would indeed ruffle the artistic mind with a vengeance, and effectually destroy ‘the calm essential to the production of great works.’ She was very fond of Frank, and found it impossible to say such a thing; but nothing short of that would even so much as attract his attention.

To-day, as she sat in her little room with her boxes ready packed for departure, she once more tried to think how Nancy was to be saved. It seemed impossible to do anything which would not inflict indelible pain on both. How kind they had been to her! They had stayed with her during that time in Princess Margaret Street. Frank had been like a brother to her then, and had stood between her and every terror and anguish of that most miserable time. Without him and Nancy she must have died. They had brought her from a sick-bed in Princess Margaret Street to their own home—had nursed her, pitied her, and loved her. They were

poor then, but for her sake had made themselves yet poorer ; they had watched over her night and day, and had gradually roused her to take some interest in life. As long as she lived, she must remain their loving debtor ; and yet there was not one thing she could do to serve them, unless it were to open Frank's eyes to the truth.

Suddenly Katherine's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Nancy's painful little cough ; and, directly afterwards, the door opened, and she came in, looking both startled and afraid, as she said :

'Katherine, Lewis is here. He knows you are going away in the morning, and that's why he has come. He wants to see you for a few minutes ;' and, having said that with some effort, Nancy stood looking at Katherine, who had turned very pale. 'I know you don't want to see him,' continued Nancy, as her friend made no answer ; 'I told him so. I said what you have always told me to say, that "after what has happened, you never can see him again ;" but he seems very unhappy, and very anxious to see you this time. He made me come upstairs to you. He said I was to tell you that he promises, on his honour, not to distress you in any way. You are to send him word by me on what footing you will meet him ; and he promises to adhere most faithfully to the part you prescribe for him. He says you may make the interview as short as you like ; but that it will be very hard to refuse to see him at all.'

Katherine preserved a troubled silence. She had been tried in this way very often during the last nine months, but had constantly been firm in her refusal.

Nancy was always very much on his side.

'He would not have asked this, if he had not known that you were going so far away,' she pleaded now. 'He may have something important to say ; and think, Katherine, you might perhaps have something you wanted to say to him.'

In a moment it flashed into Katherine's mind that there was indeed something which it was of the utmost consequence that she should say to him. He was the very man to help her. She would get him to speak to Frank about Nancy's health--at once her difficulty was solved.

'Say I will see him for ten minutes. Ask him to remember what has happened, and have mercy on me, and spare me as much pain as he can. Tell him he can give me no greater pain than to force me to repeat to him that our lives must henceforth be passed apart. Make him promise not to say one word of love to me. I am ill, and weak, and miserable, and only a woman after all, and he must spare me. You go and say this, and I will follow you directly.'

Ten minutes later Barrington was in the Davenports' drawing-room, standing looking out of the window, but seeing nothing. After nine long months of denial and banishment, he was to see her. He was not to speak of love to her ; and yet he knew all that she

had suffered for his sake—knew that she was homeless and penniless, and longed to entreat her to let him take her to his heart and home, and work for her all the rest of his life. He was, however, to be allowed to do none of these things ; and his great love was to be expressed only by silence. He heard a slight sound in the distance—he had not seen her for nearly a year, and she was coming. She entered the room as one who knows that she must try to seem very brave indeed, or she will not be able to be brave at all ; but, when she came within a few feet of him, she stood still, as if her courage had suddenly failed her. It was inexpressibly pathetic to see her. She was so young, and yet she had none of the buoyant lightness of youth—so beautiful, and yet so changed. Her figure looked slighter and prettier than ever ; but she was clad in a long, close-fitting, and entirely plain black garment, which fell in straight folds to the ground. She had the air of one who had put aside for ever all the graces and joys of colour—even to the very roses in her cheeks ; and now she stood there before him almost like a visitant from another world, meek and uncomplaining.

She had never raised her eyelids after entering the room. He watched for the first look from those never-to-be-forgotten eyes, but their light was hidden away from him. There was no perceptible delay in his greeting, not even when she stood thus before him, and when he who loved her more than life, and who could see that she loved him too, had to nerve himself to treat her with the coldness she had required of him. He was to show no love and to expect none. And yet there he stood with his heart brimful of passionate love and worship, and she, poor darling, so slight, so delicate, so young, so unhappy, and so all his own, was standing close behind him, pressing her nails into her hands to help her to bear the strain on her courage, and he saw it and knew it, and must act as if he saw and knew nothing. He hurriedly stepped forward, knelt down, and kissed the hem of her garment. It was a genuine act of reverence ; as quickly, he rose again to his feet—he was afraid lest he should alarm her.

‘You wished to see me,’ said Katherine. ‘I have come.’

She spoke coldly ; she was obliged to pitch her voice artificially, or it would have betrayed her.

‘It is July. I have wished to see you every day for nine months.’ He was goaded by her supposing that his desire to see her was a new thing, so he said this.

Katherine shivered. This computation of his had taken her thoughts back to what had happened just nine months ago. He saw what he had done, and said hastily :

‘You are going to leave London.’

‘Yes, I am going to leave London. I am at last going to begin to do something.’

He winced visibly. He knew what she was about to do—Nancy

had told him ; it was inexpressibly galling to him that his adorable Katherine should enter on such a life as that which she had chosen.

She saw the impression this thought made on him, and exclaimed :

‘Don’t let us think of me—besides, it is better for me to have something to do. I want to talk to you about Nancy—you have always been kind to her.’

His face darkened in a moment.

‘She looks very ill,’ said he anxiously ; ‘I have been thinking so for some time.’

‘She is ill—worse than anyone knows, and Frank is so engrossed by his work that he does not see the danger she is in. She ought to be carefully nursed and have every comfort ; and, instead of that, it is he who gets all the nursing and most of the comfort. She works for him from morning till night. Couldn’t you get him to do some illustrations and some paying work ? He is determined to paint nothing but large important pictures which will take the world by storm ; and in the meantime Nancy doesn’t know what to do for want of a little money, and she looks so ill, and has such a cough.’

‘I will talk to Frank—I will see that this doesn’t go on,’ said Barrington earnestly. ‘I will indeed—you may trust me. I am so much obliged to you for speaking thus. Frank is a good fellow, but he has always been a great anxiety to me. I will look after him at once. You will understand that their affairs have rather escaped my control since you have been staying in the house, and I have seen so little of them.’

‘When I am gone, you will come again,’ said she simply.

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘I will come.’

Then there was a pause, for the only subject on which they could talk without an effort was exhausted. Would she allow him to speak of what was near and dear to him, or would his attempting to do so be the signal for her departure ?

‘Katherine,’ said he at last, ‘do you hold me absolutely to that promise which you exacted from me before you came down ? May I not say one word of what lies uppermost in my heart—my love for you ?’

She shook her head, and then said slowly and painfully, but yet firmly :

‘I do hold you to it. That subject must never again be named between us.’

‘But when the feeling exists—when I do love you so much—why not speak of it ? Katherine, I shall never change, and I do not believe that you will either.’

Katherine was silent for an instant, thinking how best to answer him. He did not press her for an answer, but continued :

‘One change, I know, has taken place in both of us. We can no longer love each other with the happy, careless yielding of ourselves up to the feeling which we had in our first youth, but we can love in a way that is better still. Our love has been tried in the fire; why should not we who have suffered together—sinned together, if you like to call it so, though I don’t see what harm we did—we who have been happy and unhappy together, why should we not pass our lives in helping and strengthening each other to do our best to live the rest of our lives nobly?’

‘Because I don’t see how I could repent the wrong I have done, and misery I have caused, if I coupled repentance with the enjoyment of what I had sinned for. No, I will go out into the world alone, and try by doing hard and disagreeable work to win forgiveness for what I did; if not, I shall be haunted for ever by the recollection of my dear father, and what I brought him to. Don’t ask me to spend my life with you. It would neither be for your happiness nor mine. I must pass through many a black and dreary year before I can ever be happy again!’

Katherine spoke very calmly and slowly, but each word cost her a great effort.

‘But you are taking up quite a Roman Catholic idea of penance and purgatory!’

‘Why shouldn’t I? I feel very much as if their ideas were right. If I think I can earn peace of mind in this way, why not let me do it? James IV. wore an iron girdle round his waist as a penance for what he had done to his father, and made it heavier and heavier every year. I won’t make mine heavier; I shall be only too glad if it makes itself lighter.’

‘But, Katherine, you must allow me to speak the truth. The whole thing is absurd—the idea of penance, I mean; and even if it were not, I should like to know what you have done to make such a course necessary? You did nothing more than hundreds of girls have done—thousands, I ought to say—you didn’t quite know your own mind about marrying, and changed it. Changing is always rather a difficulty, and you and I found it so. We did one or two things we had better left undone, perhaps, but nothing so very bad. You drive me to speak plainly; you are letting exaggerated ideas on certain points carry you too far; it’s absurd to make such a crime of anything that we did!’

On hearing this, Katherine clasped her forehead with both hands, as if she had received a terrible blow, and stood for a moment unable to speak.

‘You say I have done nothing so very bad!’ said she, at length. ‘You either do not know what I have done, or do not think rightly on these points. What is it to promise a man to be his wife, and to love him, and him only? Is it to go out by appointment to meet another, whom you love a thousand times better, morning after

morning for weeks? Would you like any girl to whom you were engaged, to do that? I did it to Roger Hackblock, and you knew I was doing it. I let him kiss me—I let him talk about our life as if it would be spent together. I did not care for his kisses; I cared for yours. I didn't want to marry him; I wanted to marry you. I never named you to him; I never opened my heart to him. I just let him believe I loved him! I let his father and mother believe it, too; and treat me like a daughter! Was that right and honourable? I behaved to my own father and mother in the same way. They trusted me, and I deceived them. You know what happened when we were discovered. My father made me promise to give Roger a fair trial for six months; but he always said that, when the six months were over, my engagement might be broken off if I really found I could not love Roger. He was quite good about that; but I was to be equally good, and neither to see you nor write to you during that time. I gave my promise, and I broke it. I saw you in secret, even while I was on a visit to the Hackblocks, living under their roof, as it were, and treated like their daughter. It was terribly base of me! I, who had parted from Roger quite affectionately in the morning, stole down in the middle of the night to be with you; and you say I did no wrong!

'Katherine, you are unjust. I own it was not right; but it is not enough to require a lifelong expiation.'

'Of course not; but you don't seem to think of the rest. You know about my poor dear father? you surely know that what we did then cost him his life?'

'Indirectly, of course, it did; but very indirectly.'

'Ah, you think it was an accident!' said Katherine, in a voice of the most profound sadness. 'It was no accident. I never thought so. He told me in the summer that would be the end if I broke off with Roger. I did not believe it then.'

To Barrington's extreme amazement this was said by Katherine without one tear. The only sign of emotion was that she spoke very quickly, and with great excitement. He need not have looked for tears. She had wept so much, and suffered so much, that she could weep no more.

'Dear Katherine,' said he calmly, though he felt anything but calm, and anything but convinced of what he was saying, 'you are under a most terrible mistake. You take the worst view, and, in your grief, it is perhaps natural that you should; but you are the only person who does so. Everyone else felt certain that your poor father's death was caused by an unhappy accident. It is almost wrong of you to torture yourself with such far-fetched ideas—it is certainly wrong to act as if they were true.'

'Lewis,' said she, in a low voice, 'they are true! God help me, I should be almost happy if I were not so sure of that!'

'Then you do really mean to go on thinking this, and are determined to drive me away from you?'

'I believe it because I know it; and I drive you away because I ought to do so. Some day you will see that I am doing right.'

'God knows whether I shall or not; I feel it very hard now. Must it really be? Then what have I to hope?'

She shook her head; there was no means of answering that question.

'Am I never to see you?'

Again she shook her head.

'Never to see you? Katherine, you will see some other man—some one who has no connection with the unhappy past—you will love him, and I shall—'

'Lewis,' said she simply, 'you know that I can never love anyone but you!'

And yet, though she said these words, they did not seem to bring him one whit nearer to her. He dared not move his chair one inch nearer to hers, or take her hand, or look in her eyes with any hope of seeing one gleam of answering love. All that seemed dead and gone—love for him might be, and he felt sure was, firmly planted in the inmost recesses of her heart; but all outward sign of it was absent.

'Then I have nothing either to fear or hope?' said he; 'and you?'

'My only hope is that I may conquer some peace of mind. If I do things I hate, that may be regarded as a penance; if not, I am sure I don't know what to do.'

'My dearest Katherine, I pity you. I sympathize with you, and love you with all my heart. Try this—give it a perfect trial; but don't cut me off from all hope—let me write to you sometimes.'

'Oh no, we must know nothing of each other! What should I care about how many disagreeable things I had to endure, if I was getting letters from you?' and, as she said this with something of her old impetuosity, a tinge of warm colour suddenly flushed her pale cheeks, and for one instant she raised her eyes to his, and let him catch a glimpse of eyes in whose depths he could perceive a love that would be his for ever.

He flung himself at her feet, threw his arms round her, and said:

'My darling—my own Katherine—don't leave me. You kill me when you even speak of it.'

Without a moment's delay, she tore herself from his embrace—if she had waited ever so brief a time, she would not have had strength to do it—and, almost before he was aware, she had fled from the room. Her heart bled at the thought of the suffering she was causing—her spirit failed her at the thought of what she would have to endure herself; but her conscience told her she was doing right, and she stood firm. The time had not yet come for her to be

happy ! She did not know that it ever would come. When once her door was shut, she threw herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

'In Nature's infinite book of secrecy,
A little I can read.'

Antony and Cleopatra.

'PLEASE, ma'am, the young pusson you said you was expecting is come. Has she to be shown into the drawing-room or the servants'-hall ?'

This was said by a maid whose attitude was scornful, and intended to convey that she for one did not intend to be 'imposed on' by any such abnormal production as a young woman with liberty to hover between the 'rooms' and the kitchen, and styling herself the lady-help.

'Where is she?' inquired Mrs. Wilbraham.

'Standing by the hall-door,' replied Rhoda, with a strong sense of elation at having already done a little to mortify the new-comer by leaving her there.

Barbara ran out, kissed Katherine, who was standing disconsolate among her boxes, like a tall, upright tombstone in the midst of flat ones, and took her to her aunt, who with graceful dignity came forward, kissed her, and, with much kindness, said :

'Dear child, we are strangers now, but I hope you will soon feel that we are friends.'

Rhoda looked black. Katherine, who had indeed been feeling herself a wandering outcast, took heart at this welcome, and lifted eyes full of surprised pleasure to Mrs. Wilbraham's face.

'She is a lady, every inch of her,' said Mrs. Wilbraham to herself. 'She shall be treated as such, and I'll make a friend of her !'

'Hadn't I better show the help upstairs, Miss Barbara?' said Rhoda, who had already settled that it would be as well to speak of the stranger by this abridged and less flattering appellation.

'I'll show Miss Carey her room myself,' replied Barbara. 'You had better see about having her boxes taken up.'

A sitting-room and bedroom opening out of each other had been prepared for Katherine, but she was at once told that this was only that she might have a place of her own to go to when she liked, for she would always be welcome to sit with Mrs. Wilbraham. That lady was indeed most effusive.

'My darling,' she said, 'I feel that I shall soon love you as my own child. I never shall see enough of you. I took to you the moment I saw your face.'

Barbara accompanied Katherine upstairs, and left her at the door

of her room. When she went into it she found Rhoda, who had just brought in the third and last box, and, as servants usually do, had placed it and its fellows most carefully with their locks turned towards the wall.

'I dare say you are tired,' said Rhoda; 'have you had a long journey?'

'I have come from London,' replied Katherine.

'Oh. Is it the first time you have been out?'

Katherine shivered at this familiar questioning, but thought she ought not to be above her work, and replied in the affirmative.

'Well, you *have* got to a queer situation for the first go off!' observed Rhoda, standing in an attitude intending to invite further conversation.

Katherine preserved a dignified silence.

'How do you like her?' continued Rhoda, with a backward jerk of her thumb in the direction in which she supposed Mrs. Wilbraham to be.

'I like Mrs. Wilbraham very much,' replied Katherine haughtily; 'she has been very kind to me.'

'That's her way! She was very kind to me last week when I came, but wait a bit. She won't be long before she begins with you, I can promise you that! You need not think that she'll always be as pleasant-spoken as she was when you came in! All of us who have been in the house for a week are about sick of her, I can assure you.'

Katherine was most uncomfortable during this conversation, but too shy to reprove a stranger. Now, however, she summoned up courage to say:

'It is not right to talk in this way, and I will not——'

'All right!' said Rhoda, who was resolved to treat Katherine as if on an equality with herself. 'Find out what she is like for yourself, if you prefer it. You will have plenty of opportunities!'

As soon as she was alone, Katherine shed a forlorn tear or two, and then blamed herself for being so easily cast down.

Her duties were ill-defined. She was to be a kind of upper housemaid with no hard work to do. She was to dust the bedrooms and drawing-room, and, as Barbara phrased it, 'give a general eye' to all the servants' work. That young lady added:

'You will find my dear aunt very kind, but a little odd in some things. She is thoroughly good, but so unpractical that she seems not to have been intended for this world. You had better follow my example and humour her in everything.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, the morning after Katherine's arrival, 'I give you complete authority over the servants. If you come to me and say that they ought to go, they shall go. I will dismiss them immediately. You have nothing to do but speak.'

This did but make Katherine uncomfortable. She had only been

an hour or two in the house ; how could her employer judge whether she was to be trusted with this power or not ? All that she said, therefore, was :

‘ Thank you. Don’t you think I had better go to my work ? It is half-past nine.’

‘ Oh no, stay a little longer. I have a great deal to say to you,’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham.

‘ I shall be very much obliged to you for any instructions you like to give me,’ said Katherine ; ‘ I am quite inexperienced, but very anxious to please you.’

‘ My dear, you please me immensely. It is a delight to me to sit and look at you. Your face is entirely sympathetic to me. There is only one thing I should like to ask you to do, and that is to put your mourning off. Will you do it ? I know people would say that you ought to go on wearing it, but will you put it off to please me ? It reminds me of death, and death is so unlovely.’

Katherine cast an appealing glance at Barbara for protection. She quickly interposed, ‘ Aunt, don’t ask her to do that just yet—you see——’

‘ Barbara, you are not quite so sensitive as I could wish,’ said Mrs. Wilbraham, whose face beamed with kind feeling. ‘ Mourning is dreadful ! Well, I won’t ask it yet, but both Katherine and you ought to learn that you didn’t come into this world to be miserable. When funerals and dismal things are going on, it is quite right to wear dismal clothing ; but when they are over, let them be over—I mean, don’t do everything you can to remind yourselves of them. Barbara, will you go and order dinner for me to-day ? I vowed yesterday that I would never go into the kitchen again. Miss Carey, I never enter my kitchen without either being told that the beer is done, or the coals, and that more must be ordered at once.’

Barbara rose to go, so did Katherine.

‘ Oh no, Miss Carey, don’t go !’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham ; ‘ I want to say something else. And Barbara, wait one moment, please, until I consider what I had better do about my cook. I am half inclined to send her a message by you that she must go away. She can neither cook a dinner nor keep her temper. It’s too bad. She is just as ill-tempered as a first-rate cook ! Shall I send her away, Miss Carey ?’

Hearing that she had only been in the house a week, Katherine advised delay ; so did Barbara, and then hurried away, to avoid further discussion.

‘ And now, my dear,’ said Mrs. Wilbraham, ‘ I want to talk to you about Barbara herself. She will, I am sure, be very much influenced by you, just as I myself shall be. She is a dear good girl, but difficult to manage in some things. What I want to say to you is this : my youngest son is very much in love with her, and is coming home to-morrow evening with the intention of proposing to

her, so you must combine with me in doing your utmost to make her accept him.'

Katherine was bewildered. Before she had been twenty-four hours in the house, she was asked to dismiss the servants at will, and to assist in making the family marriages! She did not know what to say, and was silent until something appropriate presented itself.

'You don't answer,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, in surprise.

'I—I have never seen Mr. Wilbraham—my advice would——'

'He is my son! My favourite son; a dear, good, handsome, intellectual fellow, whom any girl might be proud to marry. He would have no difficulty in finding a wife as nice as Barbara, charming as she is; but think of her! If she persisted in refusing him, I am sure she would repent it as long as she lived.'

'But why do you imagine that she will refuse him?'

'Because whenever I speak to her on the subject, she says she will. Will you talk to her, my dear; will you use your best endeavours to secure my boy's happiness?'

'But won't she think that I am taking a liberty?'

'Oh no, I am sure she won't; you are not like other people—no one would resent anything you did. I am sure I couldn't.'

'Then if you think I may, I will; but had I not better go upstairs now? It will soon be eleven, and Rhoda must be wondering where I am.'

'Oh, never mind Rhoda; there is no hurry. I want to tell you one reason which may have something to do with my niece's being unwilling to accept dear Wentworth. I can't help thinking that she is attached to my other son, Coventry.'

Katherine began to feel sincere pity for Barbara, and humbly suggested that it would be wiser to let her arrange her own love-affairs.

'Oh no, that would not do at all; she would engage herself to Coventry. Everyone likes Coventry best, and that's why I don't choose to have her doing it too. It's not at all fair that he should carry off everything! Barbara—yes, I am sure Barbara is very fond of him; I have observed her closely.'

'And he? Is he attached to her?' inquired Katherine, with increased interest, both on Barbara's account, and because she now remembered that he was the gentleman who had bought the two pictures of herself in the Academy.

'He likes her very much; he's not the least in love with her—it might end that way, but he is not in love yet, and I don't intend to let him have much chance of being so.'

'But if she likes him so much, he probably is just as much attracted by her; why not let her choose for herself? She knows best what would make her happy.'

'There you are wrong—there is no harm in being wrong. It is a

very common idea that each person best knows what suits him, but it's not so at all. If you want to know what people really are like, and which two people are best fitted for each other, you ought to consult a woman of my kind ;—naturally clever—there's no vanity, I hope, in saying that—and with a sensitiveness which is more subtle in its intuitions than instinct itself. I know things by a secret sense—I feel them. Barbara trusts to what she sees and hears, and blundering methods of observation of that kind. They have their value, of course, and I use them myself frequently enough ; but the knowledge that flashes into my mind of its own accord is what I really rely on. It is heaven-sent, and not given to one in a thousand ! Barbara knows that I have it, and is a stupid girl not to profit by her opportunity of using it.'

Katherine was extremely ill at ease during this long conversation. She did not like to have Barbara's secrets laid open to her ; and besides that, she felt that she ought to be upstairs doing her work. Then, too, she already sympathized with Barbara's preference for Coventry, and felt sure that Wentworth was a very disagreeable fellow.

'Coventry gets everything,' continued Mrs. Wilbraham ; 'he got his father's land—even this very house was left to him, only I was determined I would remain in it as long as I lived. I had no fancy for being minished and brought low, as I should have been if I had been obliged to betake myself to the dower-house. Then Coventry has the Northumberland property, which his uncle ought to have divided between the two boys. Nobody likes Wentworth—nobody is just to him ; so he shall have every penny of my money, and I will take the management of his future into my own hands. He shall certainly have Barbara, for she will suit him perfectly. She is pretty, and sweet, and yielding. He is not particularly steady, so the great thing is to get him happily married. People tell you to leave such matters to Providence, but Providence does not look closely into things of this kind ; and if that boy got a wife who did not suit him, he would be ruined. Promise to help me. Talk to her this morning—do it now. I'll go upstairs and leave you alone with her till luncheon. I shall be in the seventh heaven when you have made her promise to accept him.'

'Let me find an opportunity to speak to her after luncheon,' pleaded Katherine ; 'I am distressed at the idea of neglecting my work.'

'Nonsense, my dear ! what work can you have to do more necessary or important than this ? Only bring Barbara to a right state of mind on this subject, and I'll love you for ever. Stay, that is nothing of a promise, for I shall do that anyhow. Well, I'll do something very delightful, not yet determined on.'

'I am sure Rhoda won't dust those rooms for me,' thought Katherine, in her anguish.

There she was emphatically right. At that very moment Miss Rhoda was engaged in mentioning to Agnes, the cook, that 'that there help downstairs seemed to be just such another as Mrs. Wilbraham herself, and must think that work took and did itself.'

'Aye, aye,' responded Agnes, 'but she won't be so set up with having to sit and talk to Mrs. Wilbraham in the drawing-room, when she finds that she is expected to be able to talk all the morning, and have her work done all the same as if she had been at it!'

Mrs. Wilbraham soon forgot about sending for Barbara, and forgot time and all else in dwelling on Wentworth's perfections. More than once Katherine tried to go, but Mrs. Wilbraham always made some excuse to keep her 'just one minute longer.' Finally Rhoda came into the room to announce luncheon, with a grin of supercilious triumph on her face at the thought of the delicate grey veil of dust which still overspread everything upstairs, and how cross Mrs. Wilbraham would be when she saw it. Mrs. Wilbraham, however, never did see it; for Barbara, observing how matters were going, and feeling sure that Katherine would not be released in time to do any of her work, ran and did it all herself.

'Miss Carey, will you come into the garden with me?' said Mrs. Wilbraham, after luncheon.

Katherine knew that part of her duty was to do a quantity of needlework, and had seen a pile laid on her own sitting-room table just before luncheon. She wondered whether it was proper for a lady-help to oppose her mistress's wishes. Before she could decide this point, Mrs. Wilbraham said:

'Rhoda, run and get Miss Carey's hat and gloves, please.'

'Oh no, thank you; I'll get them myself,' said Katherine, who was afraid that Rhoda would not like to wait on such a humble person as herself.

Rhoda tossed her head indignantly, but began to go upstairs.

'She is a stupid old thing,' said she; 'I dare say you are beginning to find her out. There she goes! Just because she knows I am nearly upstairs, she starts to ring. Just you tell her, when you go back, that the more she goes on ringing for me, the more I won't come near her. I have given her everything she ought to want, already.'

Katherine did not hear much of this speech, for she had hurried away to fetch her hat; but she had made up her mind neither to resent nor repeat anything the servants chose to say to her, but to go about her work quietly, and ignore their existence as much as possible. To do otherwise would be but to add to the difficulties of a household which seemed to be already overburdened with them.

'Now, my dear,' observed Mrs. Wilbraham, when Katherine returned, 'we will have a happy hour or so in the garden. Stay, I will take my waterproof and umbrella, for it is as well to be provided, and we shall very likely walk through the dene.'

Barbara looked regretful when she saw Katherine burdened with these useless things ; but there was no help for it, and she herself was going on an errand elsewhere.

‘Come once round the garden with us, Barbara, before you go to the farm,’ said her aunt.

‘How lovely the garden is!’ exclaimed Katherine. ‘There’s not an ugly corner in it!’

‘I see rather an ugly one,’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham ; ‘but it won’t be so long. Barbara, will you tell Adams to bring that fallen tree out of the dene and put it there? He must arrange it so that it looks really picturesque. Explain to him that I want a bit of Salvator Rosa scenery in that corner.’

‘But, aunt, he won’t have the slightest idea what you mean.’

‘I dare say not, but that is the way to make him read ; he will see his ignorance.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Barbara doubtfully. ‘I almost think, as I have to walk to Ayliffe Farm, that I ought to go ; it’s three miles off.’

‘Yes, don’t be long, or you won’t be back in time for dinner,’ said Mrs. Wilbraham ; ‘but take another turn round the garden with us before you go—it’s nice to have you with us.’

Instead of one turn they took four or five, and each time she passed them by, Mrs. Wilbraham became more and more indignant with some small beds of scarlet geraniums. There was a cluster of a dozen or so, all alike in shape and size.

‘Barbara,’ she said at length, ‘go into the kitchen-garden and see if Adams is there. Tell him to come here immediately, and to bring his spade with him. I’ll have those geraniums dug up. I’m in the mood for blue flowers to-day, and I’ll have blue ones. There are quantities in those frames of his.’

‘Yes, but I wouldn’t change them now, aunt—the geraniums are in flower ; Adams will be so cross.’

‘My dear, what do we keep gardeners for, but to make our gardens as we like them? Scarlet geraniums do not satisfy every need of my being! Tell him to come at once ; say I am waiting here to tell him what to do.’

Having sent Barbara on this errand, it was but natural that Mrs. Wilbraham should forget that she had summoned her gardener—forget her strong desire to see beds of blue flowers bloom at her bidding—and stray away into the dene, where the exquisite loveliness of all she saw soon made her regret that she had wasted a moment in the garden.

‘Look at those ferns,’ said she, ‘how royal and stately they are! and one might spend a lifetime and not see half the beauty of that small-leaved ivy! Did you ever see such grace? And, Katherine—you must let me call you Katherine, because I love you so—I really do think there is no delight in the world that can be compared

with that of looking up at fragments of blue sky peeping between beautiful sunlit leaves. It is too delicious ! and look where they overlap each other, and you get a green that is still sunlit, but rather deeper in colour. People pity me for having domestic worries, but such sights as these would make me quite indifferent if every servant that ever existed was buried full fathoms five beneath the sea ! Can't you understand that, dear ? This dene is heavenly ! There is no other word for it.'

Here the poor lady sighed—her happiness was almost too great ! The path led down hill through the dene, and was overhung by trees all the way. They made it cool, but they made it dangerous to Mrs. Wilbraham, for she could not refrain from looking up and feasting her eyes on the various forms of their leaves, and watching them wave gently apart from each other, and disclose a sky of the purest and deepest blue. Even if she had been looking at the path, her sight was so bad that she was in constant danger of stumbling over interlacing roots of trees and stray branches of bramble and honeysuckle. She was forced to lean on Katherine, and Katherine, who was already burdened with a large waterproof and umbrella, found her a little heavy. But she was so intensely happy at the sight of all around her, that Katherine could not repine at a little personal inconvenience. Mrs. Wilbraham's eyes were certainly not strong enough to let her see a tithe of the details which made up the charm of what was before her ; but when her sight had been good, she had studied natural objects so thoroughly, and taken them so into her heart and soul, that now the mere scent of a flower made her see its perfect form, and it was the same with everything else.

'I am a worshipper of beauty,' said she ; ' beauty of all kinds. When I am in the midst of fine scenery, I feel almost out of my mind with delight ; and so I am when I see a handsome person. It does not signify whether it is a man, or a woman, or a child who has this beauty : I am a slave to that person. And so everyone ought to be ; for even if he is a devil, he has one God-like gift. Some people prefer to have God-like gifts inside their fellow-creatures—out of sight, I mean, in the shape of good qualities or virtues—that's a way of being beautiful too ; but so few people ever profit by it, that, for my part, I prefer a handsome face or form that strikes you dumb at once. Besides, anyone who is handsome is sure to be good, too. Katherine, you should see my Wentworth ! By-the-bye, have you talked to Barbara ?'

'I have not had an opportunity. I have been with you all the day.'

'It's rather naughty of you not to have made an opportunity ; people ought to make opportunities ; but you will, I am sure. Here we are at the sea ! We will go and sit somewhere on the beach. One of the great charms of this place is the way you can suddenly exchange a green wood for a smooth stretch of yellow sand.'

They went onwards to the beach, and sat and watched the waves coming slowly nearer and nearer ; then Mrs. Wilbraham said :
 'Let us walk.'

They walked on for two miles, sometimes sitting down to rest. Katherine felt it must be getting late, but was afraid to say so. Everything pleased Mrs. Wilbraham—the soft splash of the waves, the delicious freshness of the air, the changing lights which passed across the sea. Suddenly she caught sight of the waterproof and umbrella Katherine was carrying, and said :

'I had forgotten that you had brought these things ; you must be tired ! Run to that cottage and leave them. We will go a little way farther to that point, and call for them on our way back.'

Katherine obeyed, and saw by her watch that it was half-past five. There was still time enough to go home before dinner if they did not sit too long.

'Oh, we have quantities of time !' said Mrs. Wilbraham ; 'besides, I don't trouble myself very much about time !'

When they reached the point, which they did in about five minutes, they saw a little fishing village, which could not be more than a quarter of a mile off. This made Mrs. Wilbraham think that she would like to walk through it, and go home by the lanes.

'It's only three miles, and we can have a cup of tea made for us at a farm-house on the way.'

'We shall be late for dinner,' was Katherine's thought ; but as Mrs. Wilbraham did not trouble herself about such considerations, it was of no use to put it into words. She did remind her of the waterproof and umbrella.

'Oh, I almost always leave things of that sort somewhere or other when I am out !' said she. 'People get tired of carrying them, and I get tired of seeing them. Besides, it will be quite a pleasure for you to go and get them to-morrow.'

They walked home through the lanes. Mrs. Wilbraham would go and have some tea at the farm-house which they passed, and would admire the garden and beg some roots of old-fashioned flowers, which Katherine had to carry ; and finally the two arrived at home at nine o'clock, just an hour and a half too late for dinner. Mrs. Wilbraham was quite unconcerned.

'It keeps a cook up to the mark, to be late now and then,' said she. 'She learns how to keep things back without spoiling them.'

Judging from the cook's face as they passed the kitchen window while seeking a short cut, Katherine thought she would have great difficulty in keeping strong language back ; but her thoughts were suddenly scattered to the winds by the sight of a tall, slim youth, who was coming quickly to meet them.

'Wentworth ! my dear, dear Wentworth !' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham.

Was this the handsome Wentworth ? His head drooped lan-

guidly ; he had a pale, unhealthy complexion, dull blue eyes, and dull brown hair. His features were large and thoroughly uninteresting, and his gait was slouching ; how could even his own mother call him handsome ?

‘Yes, it’s Wentworth,’ said he ; ‘but really, mother, I don’t feel much impressed by the amount of affection you have shown me ! It is nine now, and I have been here since five !’

‘My dear boy, why did you not tell me that there was a chance of your getting here a day earlier ?’

‘What do you mean ? I said from the first that I should be here to-day—at five, I told you. I can tell you that I thought it very queer when I got to Donnington, and there was no carriage to meet me, and queerer still when I got home, and there was no one to speak to and nothing to eat !’

‘But I read your letter most carefully, with two pairs of spectacles on. I am sure you said to-morrow. I told you that it was to-morrow he was coming, Katherine, didn’t I ? Wentworth, let me introduce you to Miss Carey.’

‘You had better look at the letter,’ said Wentworth, after bowing coldly to Katherine. ‘Look at it and you’ll see.’

The letter was produced, but he turned sulkily away, saying that he didn’t want to see it ; he knew what was there without any looking.

‘Will you read that bit at the bottom of the first page, Katherine ?’ said Mrs. Wilbraham ; ‘read it, and tell me if I am not right.’

She was wrong, for it said :

‘Expect me home at five o’clock on Thursday. Send carriage to meet 4.20 train.’

Katherine read this, but while so doing her face became as white as the paper before her. The writing was so strangely like Barrington’s that the sight of it quite startled her. No one saw her confusion, and she quickly folded the letter again and returned it to Mrs. Wilbraham, wondering much how this ugly, unpleasant-looking, disagreeable young man could write like one so infinitely superior to himself. She saw Wentworth Wilbraham, however, under unfavourable circumstances ; he was tired, hungry, and cross.

‘I feel I shall detest him,’ was her first impression, and further acquaintance only proved how trustworthy it had been.

CHAPTER XXX.

‘I have met with women who would like to be married to a Poem and given away by a Novel.’—JOHN KEATS.

KATHERINE had never felt so tired in her life, and yet she had not done one stroke of real work all day. When the long-deferred dinner was over she left the room, threw a shawl round her, and almost felt her way to a seat she remembered to have seen in the

garden. It was some little distance from the house, which looked enormously large and mysterious in the universal darkness. Only half a dozen rooms in that immense building were used by Mrs. Wilbraham, and only two of these were lighted up—the dining-room, where she and her son were now lingering, and the drawing-room. The windows of both stood open, and bright light streamed forth, which made the gloom of the rest of the house more apparent. To be alone was happiness. Katherine had never spent a day of such constraint before. Would every day now be like this? The perfect quiet soothed her; it soothed her, too, to be able to give up playing the contented dependent, when content, alas! was far from her.

She did not know how long she had been there, when she saw Barbara standing at the window leaning with her forehead against the glass. ‘She is unhappy too!’ thought Katherine; ‘I’ll go to her.’

Barbara was crying, but she wiped away her tears and said she supposed she must be tired, for she hadn’t anything to cry about, really.

‘Let us go to bed,’ said she, almost immediately, and Katherine could see fresh tears come to her eyes as she lighted her candle. Katherine put her hand in hers in quiet sympathy, and together the girls went upstairs.

‘Mrs. Wilbraham won’t think it odd of us not to stay and bid her good-night, will she?’ inquired Katherine.

‘She’ll think of nothing but Wentworth, now he is here. She will never notice anything that we do. By-the-bye, how do you like him, Katherine?’

‘Oh, I think I like him,’ replied Katherine, not knowing how to answer her.

‘I wish I did!’ said Barbara. ‘But I do like him very much,’ she added, as if afraid of saying more than she ought.

Wentworth went to bed very late. When he did go he awoke everyone by tramping heavily along the corridor; and he was up betimes and went whistling downstairs, much to the indignation of the two sleepy girls. Mrs. Wilbraham was up early also. Katherine wanted to breakfast in her own room, but was not allowed. Mrs. Wilbraham herself came to take her downstairs.

‘You breakfast alone! No, you are part of the family! I am going to love you just as much as if you were my own child. Oh, Katherine, you can have no idea how happy I am now that I have got my dear Wentworth back! You don’t know how I love that boy! Come down. It is a pity to waste one moment by staying away from him! And yet I shall see very little of him to-day. What do you think I am going to do? I am going to send Barbara to Downington to do some shopping for me. She shall go in the pony-carriage, and Wentworth shall drive her, and then he can offer to her on the way. Isn’t it a splendid idea?’

'Very,' said Katherine; nevertheless, she could not help remembering a story she had heard of an American who took the girl he was in love with a sleighing excursion, proposed to her when he was just eight miles from home, and had all the discomfort of the long return drive in her company after being hopelessly refused.

'Come, Katherine, come! I begrudge every minute away from Wentworth. He is such a dear, good fellow!'

The 'dear, good fellow' was finding fault with everything on the breakfast-table when they entered the room. The bread was heavy, the cream thin, the tea weak, the coffee cold, and the butter bad. He hated bacon, and had a thorough contempt for eggs. Likewise, he heartily despised the uninventive house-keeping he saw before him.

'You are so amusing; dear,' said Mrs. Wilbraham gaily; 'but eat something—try to find something to please you.'

'I don't see where it is to come from,' said he rudely. 'Read your letters, mother; I can't think how people can leave their letters sprawling about unopened.'

'Dear Wentworth, yes—but I don't care about my letters now; I'd much rather look at you.'

'Bosh!' said he. 'Can't you read them when they are there? How are your eyes, by the way?'

'Bad. Worse every day. At least, I sometimes fear it. Have some tongue?'

'Aunt, do read your letters,' said Barbara, who knew there was one from Coventry among them; but Mrs. Wilbraham declined to think of letters until she and Wentworth were gone.

'I need not take Wentworth from you, aunt; I can drive myself,' said Barbara; but this did not suit Mrs. Wilbraham's purpose at all.

'I suppose I may go and do some work?' said Katherine to Barbara in a whisper, while the others were making their arrangements together in a distant part of the room. 'I mean, Mrs. Wilbraham can amuse herself—she won't want me?'

'Oh no; she will be very happy with her piano. She plays for hours together, and so beautifully.'

'Then I'll go at once.'

'Do, dear; I ought to warn you that she is capable of keeping you talking the whole morning and then wondering why everything is left undone.'

'Katherine, where are you going, my child?' said Mrs. Wilbraham, when she saw her stealing away. 'Wait a minute or two; you must see them start—I want you to see how well Wentworth drives.'

They started. Barbara looked beautiful, so did the pony, but Wentworth did not.

'My heart goes with them!' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'Barbara little thinks what an offer she is going to have this day! Poor dear girl, what an eventful day this will be in her life! Stop, stop, dear

Katherine! I know you want to get away, but before you go, do take down my Shelley and see if you can find me a passage that kept dancing about in my brain all the time I was dressing. It was not that I saw any daisies on the lawn, and that they reminded me of it, for I can't see such small things, though I know they are there, for I won't allow the gardener to root them up. Shelley speaks of them as the constellated flowers that never set. It is in a poem that I am very fond of, but I never can remember names.'

'I know it—I am very fond of it, too. Shall I read it?'

'So you like that!' said Mrs. Wilbraham, when Katherine had read it. 'Then you and I enjoy the same things. Before you go—I won't keep you a minute, but do read one or two more of your favourite poems. I do so want to see if our tastes are really the same. Try two or three short bits of Keats.'

Before Katherine had read many minutes she was surprised to feel the soft caressing touch of Mrs. Wilbraham's pretty fingers about her hair. That lady had risen from her seat and was taking Katherine's hair down. Katherine stopped reading, and looked her inquiry.

'I saw the sun shining on a little bit of it which had come unfastened,' said Mrs. Wilbraham apologetically; 'it looked like lovely gold! I never in my life saw anything so exquisite! That bit of hair seemed to be made of fine filaments of gold with sparkling beads glittering here and there among it! Let me take it all down and spread it out on your shoulders, and see it with the sun piercing its way little by little into the whole mass. It must be a magnificent sight. My darling, you won't mind what I am doing, I am sure. You are like a fine Florentine picture! But the sun is not shining properly—it has gone in just when we wanted it the most. What a pity?'

They watched the sky for some moments, and then Katherine, who had not forgotten Barbara's friendly hint, said:

'I am afraid it has clouded over for a long time,' and began to fasten up her hair.

'Oh no! don't do that yet. I want to see your hair in the full blaze of sunlight. Having had a foretaste of what the sight would be, I can't suffer myself to be defrauded of it.'

'Shall I go away and do something for a while, and then come back?'

'Oh no! the sun seems sulky, or perhaps only coquettish; still, we must catch him the moment he consents to show himself. There is no great hurry.'

'I am afraid——'

'Don't be afraid of anything. Think what pleasure you are giving me. I am not going to let you run away, for my eyes get worse rapidly, and I must enjoy all pleasures of sight while I am able.'

'My work! My dusting! What will Rhoda say?' were Katherine's troubled mental ejaculations. She began to think she never should get anything done.

'Do you know Italian?' asked Mrs. Wilbraham.

'A little.'

'Well, then, I'll ask you to do something for me. When I used to read that language, I once read a poem, which was so pretty that I have never forgotten it. It was about a knight who was a prisoner somewhere, and to make his escape had to pass through some place filled with enemies sworn to take his life, and he was entirely defenceless and at their mercy; but a beautiful woman, who was in love with him, carried him safely right through the very midst of them by letting down her lovely hair, and covering him with it. It was so long and so thick that it concealed him from them, and under this beautiful shelter he and she passed through the danger in safety. That's something like the story. It is thirty years or more since I read it, so I do not remember it perfectly; but I'd give anything to find it again. Those are my Italian books in white and gold bindings. There are two shelves full of them. Will you try to find that story for me? I am almost sure that it is in one of them; your lovely hair has made me think of it.'

'Most willingly. I will look them through at night. And now I really think there is no chance of our having any more sun to-day; I had better knot up this untidy hair, and go and do something useful.'

'Untidy! It is exquisite! So soft and filmy. It's like a lovely golden cloud; and you are doing something useful—most useful! You are supplying me with something beautiful to think about when my day of total darkness comes.'

'I hope it never will come.'

'It will; but don't let us think of it till it does.' You need not waste your time while we are waiting for sunshine, if that is what is distressing you. You have Shelley on your lap, and Keats on a chair within reach; read me something. How I do wonder how Barbara and my dear Wentworth are getting on! Heigho! Come, read something.'

Katherine had a book in her hand, and was ready to begin as soon as Mrs. Wilbraham would let her.

'Read some Shelley. Oh, that is Shelley you have. What a man that must have been to know! It is a great grief to me that I did not live fifty or sixty years ago—or whenever it was, for I hate dates—when our idiotic, stupid-minded, hob-nailed forefathers were so busily engaged in crushing out the lives of some of this country's greatest geniuses. I should have liked to provide every comfort and luxury imaginable for poor dear Keats—perhaps he might have lived to a good old age if I had been there to look after him; and I would have been a tender and indulgent mother to Shelley, and

have tried to suit myself to that difficult Byron. Now read, dear. Let us have a real feast ; and never mind if the sunshine does not come—your hair looks splendid even without a spark of it !

Katherine read, and Mrs. Wilbraham listened in the utmost delight. Every care and anxiety slipped away from her, and she sat absolutely steeped in happiness listening to Katherine's sweet voice, and looking at the pretty picture she made.

'I shall live on this for weeks,' said she ; 'it makes me thoroughly independent of the world and all its petty troubles. I can honestly say that I have not felt so happy for years.'

It was late in the morning when at length the sun shone forth. Mrs. Wilbraham had covered her eyes with her hands, the better to enjoy a particular poem. Katherine had forgotten everything but what she was reading. Suddenly Mrs. Wilbraham looked up, and saw that what they had so long waited for had come.

'Oh, the sun ! the sun ! and the effect is a thousand times more beautiful than I expected !' she exclaimed. 'How I wish I had an artist here to paint you ! Oh, my dear Katherine !' she suddenly said, in great alarm, 'there is a man behind you ! Look there ! he is standing outside the window !'

Katherine started to her feet, and pushed back the blinding mass of hair which covered her eyes to see. The person outside pressed closer to the window and said :

'It is I. You expected me, didn't you ? I know I ought to have made my presence known at once ! and I would have done so, if I had not been startled by seeing such a beautiful picture.'

Katherine gathered her hair up into an ugly knot in her hand, to silence his compliments : or at least tried to do so, for there was no making it ugly in reality. She blushed, and felt as if surprised while doing something wrong. How very handsome he was !

'Coventry !' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham ; 'I did not expect to see you ! Go on to the next window ; it opens on the ground.'

While he was obeying, Katherine tried to escape, and had her hand on the door to open it, when he stopped her by the exclamation :

'Miss Carey, let me be formally presented to you ! I have wished it so long.'

Katherine thought it very cruel and tactless of him to remind her of those days which he might know must be so bitter to remember. She sighed deeply, and stood waiting to see what Mrs. Wilbraham wished her to do.

'Stay, dear,' said that lady. 'This is my eldest son, whom I am glad to see at home.'

She had been on rather bad terms with him for some months, so he looked up much pleased with his speech.

'Perhaps that letter you wrote to me was about your visit,' said Mrs. Wilbraham.

‘Then you have not read it?’ said he; and then, catching sight of the unopened letter, he added bitterly: ‘Mother, you would not have left one of Wentworth’s letters unread.’

Much hurt by this proof of indifference, he went and stood by the window. Katherine stole away, hoping that Mrs. Wilbraham would go and give him a motherly kiss, and say something to please him; but if she did, she was very quick about it, for before Katherine had got her hair put up again, Mrs. Wilbraham came into her bedroom, and said:

‘How I do wish Coventry were even half as nice as dear Wentworth!’

‘But is he not?’ asked Katherine. ‘I like what I have seen of him very much.’

‘He is nice enough in some things; I ought to get on better with him, for he has a great deal of my enthusiasm—more, perhaps, than Wentworth, really; but I don’t know what it is about him that makes it so difficult for me to sympathize with him—perhaps it is because he is so full of robust life, or it may be because he is a Liberal. I am a Liberal myself, but not in all things; it is so unpoetical to be a Liberal in some things. A man ought to cling to every institution of his country that has had the seal of custom set on it. Even if some of these do bear rather hardly on the lower orders, that’s surely no reason for abolishing them. Have not the lower orders always been more or less oppressed, and is it not far better for them to be so? I should like to know who would care to live if all that was irregular and picturesque, and even sometimes a little unjust, in the management of a country were done away with, and everything brought to a dead level of universal satisfaction and well being? What are you going to do, dear?’

‘Dear Mrs. Wilbraham, I came to Chilworth to work,’ said Katherine, blushing, ‘and I have not done one thing since I came! I was just going to begin.’

‘That reminds me of the very thing I came to say,’ observed Mrs. Wilbraham. ‘Don’t let me distress you, dear, but I went into my room a few minutes since, and found quite a thick coating of dust over all the furniture, and it must have been bad for my poor eyes to see it.’

‘I know—I know; I have been thinking of it all the morning, and feeling that I ought to be upstairs. I am so sorry, but it is not quite my fault, now is it?’

‘I know you have not had much time,’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham, with quite unusual consideration, for she was still softened by the influence of her beloved poets; ‘but still, a little thing like that requires such a short time to remove it, that I really think it ought to be done; it can be done at any odd moment.’

‘It shall be done henceforth, punctually and regularly. I promise you that.’

'Luncheon is ready,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'Let us go down together. I want you to help me to talk to Coventry; I can't find half so much to say to him as I can to Wentworth.'

But Katherine excused herself. She was not hungry, she said, and did not want any luncheon.

Mrs. Wilbraham was forced to yield, and then Katherine began to work harder than she had ever worked before, and Miss Rhoda went about with her eyes dancing with malice, because a secret sense informed her that 'Missis had crazed the help.'

'Where is Barbara?' inquired Coventry.

'Gone to Donnington, with Wentworth.'

'Oh, is Wentworth here? I heard he was yachting on the South Coast with a set of the wildest fellows in London.'

'Coventry, I resent any insult to him as much as if——'

'Mother, is it insulting to state a fact? I did hear that—it was some time since, I know——'

'If you and I are to get on, Coventry, you must not believe things against your brother.'

Coventry shrugged his shoulders, and muttered something about belief being founded on evidence, and then he said:

'So you have Miss Carey with you; I heard she was here. I hope she will soon look happy again.'

'Oh, Coventry! no; don't wish that, her little air of resigned melancholy adds so infinitely to her attractiveness. She would not be half so interesting if she lost it.'

Coventry again shrugged his shoulders. After this, conversation languished, and finally he went out, wandered about for a while near home, and then went by the dene to the beach, where, later in the afternoon, he met Katherine, who had been sent by his mother to bring back the waterproof and umbrella left the day before—a mission which fell to her lot, by the way, on an average twice a week all the time she was at Chilworth. Katherine, with her beautiful sad face and gentle words, was a welcome change after his mother, with her harsh ways and speeches.

'My mother does not love me, Miss Carey,' said he. 'I have only come for one day, and somehow it has been rather a strange one. I wish Barbara had been at home.'

'She must have come back by this time. Let us walk quickly and see.'

'Oh, don't let us walk quite so fast. I feel very happy now, but somehow or other I know I shall not be so long. I am sure that something very disagreeable will happen the moment we enter the house.'

'Oh no!' said Katherine; 'that is only a fancy. Why should anything bad happen?'

He looked earnestly at her with his sincere grey eyes, and said:

'I ought not to complain of my mother, but she does make my life a little difficult.'

Katherine did not like to enlarge on this subject, and conversation would have languished if he had not begun to talk of indifferent matters.

No sooner did they enter the house than they both felt as if his presentiment were about to be realized. All the doors were closed ; absolute silence reigned ; the air of the house seemed to be charged with inimical forces. How is it that the very air of a house has this power of informing those who enter, that something painful has occurred ?

‘Those are Barbara’s gloves on the table,’ observed Katherine ; ‘so she and your brother must have come back from Donnington.’

‘I am very glad of it ; but I feel something has gone wrong.’

No one was in any of the downstairs rooms. Katherine hastened upstairs. Coventry threw himself on a chair with an air of great dissatisfaction. Katherine had been told to go to Mrs. Wilbraham the moment she returned. She did so. The door was locked.

‘I can’t see you. I can’t see anyone!’ cried Mrs. Wilbraham from within.

So Katherine went to Barbara. She was lying on her sofa ; her hat had fallen off, her hair had come down, her cheeks were blistered with tears. Katherine knelt down by her and took her hand.

‘I have been wanting you so, dear!’ sobbed Barbara. ‘That odious Wentworth—oh, how I do hate him, horrible creature that he is!—has asked me to marry him. He began to do it almost directly we left, and talked as if he thought he were doing me a great favour and I had no power of refusing him! That’s what vexed me the most, I think! As if I would marry such a creature! As if anyone would! I told him I wouldn’t, but he just went on asking me all the same, and wouldn’t listen to me when I said I did not care for him in that way, and never should. You can’t think what trouble I had to drive it into his head that I was telling him the truth ; and when at last I succeeded, he got furious, and said that if I did not love him it must be because I preferred some one else ; and he would soon find out who it was, and take care I was disappointed. I told him he might do as he liked, for, in the first place, I was not in love with anyone else, and in the next, nothing would ever make me in love with him. That made us quarrel still more. We quarrelled all the way. You can’t think how angry and disagreeable he became ; and the moment we reached Donnington he got out of the pony-carriage and made me a low bow, looking so ill-tempered and hideous as he did it, and told me I was to inform his mother that he had gone to London by the express, and was not coming back to Chilworth again. And go he did by the train, which was just starting. I came home as quickly as I could, in the greatest terror of aunt and what she would say to me for driving him away. But she was a thousand times worse than I expected. It was terrible! I had no idea she could be so cruel!’

'Don't cry, dear ; she will soon forgive you.'

'Never ! She never will ! She told me so, and I know it's true. She means me to marry Wentworth ; and, what's more, I shall have to do it, for I have not a penny in the world, and no home but this. I have no friends either. I shall have to be his wife if aunt goes on being cross with me, for I can't bear it. But, Katherine, I hate him ; there is not one good thing about him. He was tipsy last night, and that's why he was so late ; and he is always getting tipsy, and she says I have driven him away from his home and deprived him of his one chance of breaking himself of the habit ; that he will grow more wild and unsteady now, and that it will be my fault ; and if something terrible happens she will say so, and blame me for it for ever.'

'That's nonsense !' said Katherine resolutely. 'She has no right to use such arguments, and your cousin ought not to try to force you to marry him. Don't do it ; do not think of doing it, unless you love him. Above everything, if there is anyone whom you love more, don't be persuaded to give him up.'

Barbara blushed crimson, but said bravely enough :

'There is some one whom I love, but he does not love me ; and even if he did, it would be of no use—aunt would make me refuse him.'

'Don't be made to do things ; choose for yourself. Get up and wash your face, and go downstairs and talk to your other cousin, who is alone and longing to see you.'

Barbara looked astounded.

'Do you mean that Coventry is here ? Impossible ! No one told me that he had come !'

'I tell you now. Be quick, and go and speak to him.'

'I can't,' said Barbara, falling back on the sofa again and beginning to weep as much as before—'I can't. My eyes are so red and my face so swollen and blistered, I couldn't say a word to him, poor dear fellow, without bursting into tears. Besides, I look frightful. I am not going to show myself to him when I am like this.'

'Oh no ! you will soon look all right again ; do go.'

'Don't ask me to do it. I should be ashamed to let him see me. Stay—if you think I'd better—well, I'll try.'

'I'll go and change my dress,' said Katherine. 'I shall find you downstairs.'

The gong sounded before Katherine was quite dressed for dinner, but she hurried down and reached the dining-room door just as Mr. Carew did. Rhoda was hastily removing knives, forks, and glasses from all seats but two as they entered the room.

'Where are all the rest ?' exclaimed Mr. Carew.

'If you please, sir, Mrs. Wilbraham is in her own room, and does not require any dinner. She requests that none may be sent to her, as she has no appetite whatsoever.'

'And Mr. Wilbraham ?

'He has left for London, sir.'

'But Miss Linley is here ? She has not gone away anywhere, I suppose ?

'No, sir ; but she has a bad headache, and is not able to come down.'

'Is it my return which has produced all these calamities ?' muttered Mr. Carew. Then he said, 'Well, Miss Carey, I suppose you and I may as well have some dinner, whatever other people do.'

And they did dine, though each felt a certain amount of embarrassment. Rhoda amused herself by watching them. She put an extra amount of ceremony into her attendance on Katherine, and imagined that by so doing she would overwhelm her with confusion, as such honours would doubtless be beyond the range of her experience.

'Mr. Coventry is actually sitting down for to eat his dinner along with our help,' said she to her friend Agnes. 'I should think the poor dear gentleman was all the time just wishing he had me to talk to instead.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

'One year ago my path was green,
My footsteps light, my brow serene,
Alas ! and could it have been so

A year ago ?'

LONDON.

COVENTRY CAREW'S *tête-à-tête* dinner with Katherine was over. He had found it such a pleasant experience that he would willingly have prolonged it had that been possible, but it was not ; so he went to the open window, thrust back a branch of jessamine which had fallen out of place, and then made Katherine come and look down into the hearts of some new-born roses.

'They are most beautiful,' said she, but she seemed as if she were thinking only how to leave him most naturally.

'Those two long borders of my mother's are quite gay,' said he, with a glance in their direction. 'It is a fine evening ; are you afraid to take one turn round the garden ?

'I think I should like to go and see how Barbara is,' replied Katherine.

Everyone in the house was behaving so strangely to him that he quite thought Katherine was going to do the same. She had been imperfectly instructed, and had come down to dinner by mistake, but was now bent on escaping from him as quickly as she could.

'I wish you would wait a minute or two longer,' said he ; 'I don't like to ask you to waste your time on me, but I really do want to speak to you.'

Katherine sat down again, and waited with some surprise for what he was about to say.

'I did so wish to see Barbara—you are a great friend of hers, I

believe? Tell me something about her—what does she do to amuse herself? Her life can't be a very happy one, though I am sure my poor mother tries to make it so.'

'I don't think she minds being dull,' said Katherine; 'she is always happy when she can make others so—that's my idea of her character.'

'It is mine too, and that is why I am so anxious about her. I am so afraid of her yielding too much to my mother—my mother takes the management of other people's lives without the least scruple; but I hope Barbara won't let her manage hers. Has she confided to you what my mother wishes her to do?'

'Yes, I think so,' replied Katherine, with some hesitation.

'I am very glad she has. May I speak to you about it? May I ask you to use your influence with her to persuade her not to be induced to marry my brother Wentworth, just because my mother tells her she will make everyone miserable if she refuses? She ought not to be asked to do such a thing until he has proved himself worthy of her. I have told my mother so, but she won't listen to me. She is resolved to have her own way, and the worst is, that from something she let fall this afternoon, I gathered that she is hoping to get Barbara's consent to this marriage, and settle everything almost directly. Miss Carey, I wish you would talk to my cousin. Don't let her do such a terrible thing, if you can help it. I would not interfere, but it is a positive duty; there are reasons which oblige me to do so. I need not enter into them with you, but my mother knows them. She would consider them more than sufficient if anyone but Wentworth were in question; but as he is, she seems to have wiped them out of her mind as completely as if they had never existed. I assure you that if Barbara marries Wentworth, she will live in wretchedness while she does live, and die broken-hearted.'

'I think I know them,' said Katherine; 'Barbara knows them, too. She told me he was rarely sober.'

'But if she knows this, why does she listen to my mother?'

'Won't you speak to her yourself?' inquired Katherine; 'she values your opinion, I know.'

'But how can I? She does not seem inclined to see me, and there is so little time to do anything, for I am going home again in the morning; besides, I should not be able to say half so much to her as you can. I couldn't do it. For anything I know she may be attached to him, and there are other reasons.'

Katherine half-smiled. She understood him to mean that he might be supposed not to be wholly disinterested in his advice. He smiled too, and his smile was a very pleasant one.

'Oh no,' said he; 'it is not that. I am quite disinterested—at least, I think I am. I love her as a cousin, sometimes a little more perhaps, and sometimes less; but always much better than I love anyone else—I own that.'

'You can't possibly love her more than she deserves,' exclaimed Katherine; 'she is the best girl I know, and the prettiest!'

'Oh no!' he began, and checked himself, lest he should offend her. 'Yes, she is very pretty, very pretty and charming.'

'I will go and see if she is feeling well enough to come down,' said Katherine, rising.

'Wait a little longer,' said he; 'I am so glad that you are here—it must be such a comfort to Barbara.'

Katherine felt inclined to wonder how he could know enough about her to have an opinion as to whether it was a comfort to Barbara to have her or not. He was very quick at reading thoughts, and saw this passing through her mind, and said:

'You must not be surprised at my having a formed opinion about your character on what seems to you a very short acquaintance; the truth is, that to me it does not seem at all a short one. You know that I was so fortunate as to secure two very beautiful pictures by Mr. Davenport, which you helped him to paint. They hang in my favourite sitting-room at home, and I have spent a great deal of conscious and unconscious thought in studying your character from them. I could not help doing it, and now, rightly or wrongly, I cannot help looking on you as a very old acquaintance—I should like to say friend.'

Katherine was for a moment too much surprised to speak, so he continued:

'I tried very hard to make your acquaintance at the same time that I became possessed of those two pictures. You will not remember the Davenports inviting you when I was to be with them; but I do, and it was a great disappointment to me that you did not appear.'

'Oh yes, Mr. Carew, I remember; but all that was so long ago,' said Katherine, rather coldly.

She was very much annoyed at the turn the conversation had taken. Barbara's interests were uppermost in her mind, and what was being said now was not at all likely to promote them. She longed for an opportunity of letting him know how dead her heart was to everything in the shape of admiration.

'Yes, it was long ago,' said he, 'but I have not forgotten it! The Davenports asked you twice when I was to be there—once to dinner and once to luncheon—but you would not come. So I used to loiter about Princess Margaret Street and that neighbourhood for hours, in the hope of seeing you, but I never did.'

'Don't remind me of my poor old home,' said Katherine, in a voice of great distress; 'I try to forget it, and all that happened at that time.'

'I beg your pardon; I know how sad it must have been for you. I was so grieved when they told me what trouble you were in. But try to forget it as much as you can, and trust that the future will restore you to happiness.'

'But I don't want to be restored to happiness,' replied Katherine simply; 'even if it were offered me, I would not accept it!'

'People often say that, and think it too; but a day comes at last, when they somehow or other happen to change their minds, and it is a good thing that it is so.'

'That day, Mr. Carew, will never come for me.'

Her face was so very pale, her figure so young and slight, but she was standing with the firm air of one who felt able to choose her own fate, and abide by her choice. He felt rather ashamed of himself when he found himself answering in these words:

'I wonder how many people have said the same, and have been belied?'

'A great many, no doubt; but I do not think that I shall be one of them. I should like everyone to understand that I not only do not seek happiness, but that I would turn from it with horror!'

He shook his head, half in incredulity, half in pity and regret; but there was a look of such warm interest in his eyes as they rested on her, that for Barbara's sake she forced herself to say:

'You do not believe me, but it is true; and to prove it to you, I will tell you that the only thing which could possibly make me happy has been offered to me—has, indeed, almost been forced on me, and yet I have refused it.'

'Surely not without regret?' said he.

'Not without something much stronger and more bitter than regret; yet I was compelled to act as I did.'

'When you might have taken it?'

'When I might have taken it, no doubt.'

'I understand compulsion, but I do not understand self-inflicted suffering, unless there is some very strong reason for it. There can be no reason why you ought to wish to pass your whole life in unhappiness. Take my word for that—my judgment is more impartial than yours can be. Let me tell you how I understand what you have said to me; I may be wrong, but you will tell me if I am, won't you? You are extremely unhappy about something—probably about something which you ought to banish entirely from your thoughts; you have taken it into your head that penance is a sacred duty; you have, in my humble opinion, come to a house where you will have many occasions of practising it, and, happy or miserable, here you mean to stay. For the present, that is well enough,' said he, 'but who knows how hardly this decision of yours may bear upon some other person? have you no compunction on that score?'

'Oh no, Mr. Carew; it bears hardly on no one—at least, I hope not! Anyhow, my life can never be very different from what it is. I trust that no one, man or woman, will ever bestow so much thought on me as to make what I do a matter of any moment. Do not let us say any more on this subject.'

'I can't help saying a little more, and thinking too. Consider how much I have thought of you ever since I first saw your portrait ! How well I remember that time ! You seemed to take entire possession of my thoughts. Well, it seems that you do not want to take possession either of mine or of anyone else's, so I will do my best to keep them to myself. I can't help wishing, though, that things had been different.'

'They never can be different with me,' she answered sadly ; 'my life is marked out for me. I can never either be happy myself, or make anyone else happy. Do not let anything tempt you to give your thoughts to me ; give them to Barbara, who can be a thousand times more to you than I ever could.'

'Let us be good and faithful friends to each other,' said he warmly. 'As for Barbara, I am very fond of her, and would do anything to help her ; but what can I do, when she won't even come downstairs to see me ? Is it Wentworth who has told her not to do so ?'

'She would not have obeyed him if he had. Even I know enough to be able to assure you of that. She is keeping out of sight because she is very unhappy, and has made herself quite ill with crying. I wish you could persuade her to tell you why she is unhappy ; you are the only person who can help her—make her tell you.'

She left the room as soon as she had said this—his eyes followed her.

'I shall have hard work to prevent myself falling more and more in love with that woman,' thought he ; 'and yet I know it would be madness to do so. I felt while she was speaking that every word she said was true, and that if I waited a lifetime I should be no nearer to getting her. I will do my best to take the warning she has given me.'

A slight sound disturbed him—Barbara was there. She stood near the door, looking almost afraid to come in.

'Barbara !' said he, but Barbara dissolved into tears. 'My dearest Barbara, don't do that ! I can't bear to see you crying. Why have you been so unkind as to let so many hours pass without coming near me ? Considering what good friends you and I have always been, I think if you were in trouble you ought to have come to me. I might have been able to do something to make things better.'

'I did want to come, Coventry—not to worry you about my troubles, but to see you.'

'But do you think I can see you unhappy without wanting to know what is the matter ? No, I must know all about it. Come and sit down and tell me.'

So saying, he took her hand, led her to a sofa, made her sit down, and again entreated her to begin.

'I can't begin,' said Barbara, turning eyes with monstrous tears

shining in them on his. 'I can't tell you. You must guess, if you want to know—it is something about Wentworth.'

'But it is so dreadfully difficult to guess,' said he; and as the light was so dim, he allowed himself to smile at her simplicity. 'Has he made you an offer?'

On this the tears detached themselves from her eyes in the form of two transparent balls, and a fresh crop sprang up in their place.

'You have refused him, I suppose. You have done right.'

'Have I really? It seems such a bad return for all aunt's kindness to me, for she wants me to accept him—Coventry, aunt has done everything for me. She has given me a home ever since I was a child; and now, when I am grown up, I refuse to do what she has set her heart on.'

That was the very reason why Coventry had been so anxious to see his cousin—he was so afraid of her being influenced by these considerations. She was penniless and homeless, and there was a danger of her being persuaded to show her gratitude for past kindnesses in a way which would wreck her life. It was wrong of his mother and Wentworth to urge her so.

'You must refuse him—at any rate for the present,' said he; 'even if you loved him I would entreat you, both for his sake and your own, to wait until he has shown that he can be steady. He must settle down and work. I don't care what he does, but he must do something. For heaven's sake don't accept him until you see some signs of change in his character.'

'I don't want to accept him at all, but aunt's anger is so terrible!'

Coventry sympathized with her, comforted her, pitied and did his best to strengthen her; and at length he had some success. They talked with each other till it was quite late—he was delightful in every way, and yet when she went to Katherine's room to say good-night after leaving him, Barbara did not express herself as quite satisfied with the interview, but remarked:

'He had too much to say about you, dear, for me to be perfectly happy! Don't think me unkind to say so.'

'Not unkind at all! He only talks of me because he has seen so much of me to-day; you won't hear him do that again.'

'One thing does make me hope that he has a little bit of liking for me,' said Barbara shyly. 'He asked me if it was any comfort to have him here, and when I said yes, he promised not to go to-morrow, but to stay a week and talk to aunt, and do his best to make her change. It is very good of him, for he is not well treated here.'

'I am afraid Mrs. Wilbraham does not like him to stay here.'

'She does not, but she can't exactly tell him to go, for it is his own house. He lets her live in it because she declares that she won't live in the dower-house—in the village, you know. She hates the name of dower-house, and says that it has a decayed sound, and that she

may as well be called Widow Wilbraham at once, and put on the shelf altogether. It's only a fancy of hers, poor dear ; but she has so many.'

'Never mind her little fancies, if you can control her big ones ; and Coventry will help you to do that.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

'*Ant.* Read not my blemishes in the world's report :
I have not kept my square ; but that to come,
Shall all be done by rule.'

Antony and Cleopatra.

COVENTRY left Chilworth, having succeeded in convincing his mother of nothing but his own want of judgment. He told her how cruel it was to try to drive a defenceless girl like Barbara into a marriage which was distasteful to her. Mrs. Wilbraham could not be brought to see that this was anything more than a bald, prosaic, and singularly untruthful, method of describing her own generous willingness to let a penniless niece possess herself of the best of husbands. She was certain that Barbara must love Wentworth in her heart, but did not know her own mind. She felt that the two cousins had known each other from infancy ; had 'grown in beauty side by side,' and that a happy marriage was the only fitting end to a happy youth. She drew a veil of dense thickness over Wentworth's 'juvenile follies.' Any little harm he had done had only been done because he was away from home and all he really cared for. Once settled there, with his own mother and a wife whom he loved, he would be absolutely steady. She knew it ; she felt it ; and when Mrs. Wilbraham once felt a thing, no other evidence was needed. As for inducing her to take into account the possibility that Barbara did not and might never love him, that was simply out of the question. How could she help loving him ? How could anyone ? Sooner or later she was certain to accept him. Where Coventry saw nothing but 'the sad confusion of a wasted youth,' Mrs. Wilbraham saw beauty and manliness, and all else that she wished to see. She made no concession to Coventry whatsoever, but told him that he was welcome to stay as long as he liked ; but that as soon as he left the house, she should telegraph to Wentworth to return.

'Why does she say that ?' asked Katherine, when informed of this speech. 'Why can't the two brothers be here together ?'

'I don't quite know why myself,' replied Barbara ; 'but I am sure that Wentworth won't come till Coventry goes. Wentworth has been doing something he should not, I believe—something disgraceful, I mean—and Coventry has helped him out of the scrape. Wentworth has no objection to take his help, but won't listen to his advice or scolding, or see him, if he can help it.'

'Then keep your cousin Coventry here.'

Coventry could not be kept much more than a week ; as soon as he went, Mrs. Wilbraham sent for Wentworth. All that she received in the shape of an answer from him was a couple of lines, saying : ' My return depends on Barbara. If I am to come to Chilworth, she must write and ask me. She will understand.' This was so short that Mrs. Wilbraham was able to decipher it herself. Then she summoned Barbara. Barbara, who was anything but happy, often required a summons now ; she was fond of getting away to some quiet corner where she could sit alone, being in constant dread of moving appeals from her aunt. Mrs. Wilbraham put this note into her hand, and said :

' Will you write to him ?'

' No,' replied Barbara firmly ; ' my mind is unchanged. I will never marry Wentworth ; but he must not be kept away from his own home and you. I will leave Chilworth.'

' Never !' exclaimed her aunt impetuously. ' When your mother died I promised to treat you in every respect as my own daughter, and my promise shall be kept.'

' Then do be kinder to me. Take pity on me, and say no more about this.'

' What more can I do for you than give you my best-beloved son, entreat you to make your home with me, and bequeath to you two all that is mine ?'

Barbara shook her head in despair. It was absolutely vain to attempt to reason with her aunt ; circumstances might occur to change her, but no argument would ever do so.

Barbara crept away to the refuge of her own room, and Katherine stayed with Mrs. Wilbraham ; that was always the way now, and gradually the poor old lady began to depend less and less on her niece, and more on Katherine. That being the case, it soon became an understood thing that all the housework which the latter had been engaged to do should be given up, and that she was for the future to be considered as Mrs. Wilbraham's companion. This was partly because Barbara was in disgrace, but still more because Mrs. Wilbraham had discovered that Katherine was a companion after her own heart. She was simply perfect, and never seemed to tire of any employment, however tedious, or to wish to do anything but serve and sympathize with her employer ; and, in addition to this, she was well educated and remarkably intelligent.

This arrangement not only made Mrs. Wilbraham much happier, but gradually produced a considerable change for the better in the household. More servants were hired. Mrs. Wilbraham never interfered with them, and all went much better, except that Katherine bore the brunt of everything, and never knew what it was to rest for ten consecutive minutes. If Mrs. Wilbraham wanted to repeat a fine poem, she did not now torment a housemaid, but repeated it to Katherine ; if a lovely rainbow bedecked the sky,

Katherine was the one who had to admire it. Katherine must always be ready to watch and wonder at 'the admirable drama of small things;' and worse to her than all else, if a 'magnificent' thunderstorm nearly shook down the hall in its fury, it was Katherine's painful duty to stand at the window by her mistress's side and revel in its beauty with her. This was a happy change for the servants. They either did their work or did not do it, but assuredly they were not furnished with so many opportunities of losing their tempers. Katherine never lost hers, though if she had not been in search of a life of penance it would have been absolutely impossible to endure a state of things in which mind and body were continually at full stretch; and besides this, Mrs. Wilbraham had some peculiarities which were simply maddening. Autumn wore away, and winter came; and with the fine weather much that made Chilworth a pleasant place of residence departed.

'I am wearying for Wentworth,' said Mrs. Wilbraham; and as she spoke she looked at Barbara, in anxious desire to espy some change in her.

Barbara unhappily could not say the words her aunt so much longed to hear, and Mrs. Wilbraham turned away unsatisfied and unhappy. She waited until November, and then dictated a letter entreating him to come home. A fortnight passed without his sending any answer to this, and yet she knew from other sources that he had received it. While she was waiting for a reply from Wentworth, Coventry appeared, and seemed inclined to stay a while.

'I shall be happy to see you for a day or two,' replied his mother. 'I should like to ask you to stay longer, but unfortunately you do not get on well with your brother, and I am expecting him here.'

Coventry looked surprised, for a friend of his had just seen Wentworth in Paris under circumstances much more congenial to his tastes than a quiet visit to Chilworth was likely to afford. He did not know that his poor mother was always expecting the return of this prodigal of hers, who had never once seriously thought of giving her that pleasure.

She accepted Coventry's visit almost meekly. She did not like his coming at this time, and she was angry that he and Barbara should see so much of each other; and yet her liberal ideas forbade her to part them by ordering Barbara to spend most of her time upstairs.

'Every human being has a right to absolute liberty,' she remarked to Katherine, 'and it is infamous to try to curtail it; and that's why I do not insist on Barbara's keeping out of the way while Coventry is here. I let her talk to him as much as she chooses, but I intend her to marry Wentworth.'

'You intend her to marry Mr. Wentworth!' Katherine exclaimed in amazement.

'Yes. I don't mean to drag her to the altar, of course—I shall

do nothing of that kind ; but I will see that she marries him somehow. And so I ought, for I understand what is good for her, better than she does herself. She is not a girl who can be at all trusted with the arrangement of her own future.'

'But is not that curtailing her liberty? Surely she has a right to mental liberty, as well as bodily.'

'My dear, she shall have quite as much liberty of all kinds as it is good for her to have. She is not so clever as you are. She has very little mind. Say no more about it.'

Katherine did say no more about it, but she took care to leave the two cousins so much alone, that in point of fact they enjoyed an almost uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*.

In the midst of this came a letter from Wentworth. Mrs. Wilbraham at once hurried to her own room with it, and sent for Katherine to read it to her; and thus again the eyes of that unhappy girl were tortured by the sight of writing which bore so close a resemblance to that of Barrington.

'Read it, dear; read it! And if you become acquainted with what ought to be kept secret, you must be faithful to me, and not reveal it; for without your help I cannot learn what he says.'

'DEAR MOTHER' (read Katherine),

'You ask me to come home. I shall not come until Barbara asks me. I said so before. I think you cannot be doing much for me or my happiness, or I should have heard from her ere this. I should have thought your influence would have had more weight with her. I am in Paris. I am forced to keep moving about. I can't stay in London, month after month, waiting for what seems never likely to come. Some friends of mine who have been here with me for the last week or two, and who see the miserable state I am in, have offered me a place in their yacht for a trip to the Mediterranean. I am going with them, for I don't seem to have anything else to do. Send me a cheque here by return of post; rather a large one, for I have my bill here to pay, and I am going to be with rich fellows, so it won't do to be stinted. I dare say a hundred and fifty or so will do; only let me have it quickly, for the yacht has gone round, and we are to meet it at Marseilles as soon as we hear it is there.'

Katherine looked at Mrs. Wilbraham. What would she do? Would she not see that this yachting tour was no sudden thought, but that he had gone to Paris quite a fortnight before to wait for the telegram which would announce the arrival of the yacht at Marseilles?

'It is very hard on him,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'More than hard! Stay here and be ready to write a letter for me! I must just go and speak to those two downstairs. I wish Coventry had never come!'

She saw 'those two,' singly and severally; Barbara first. Barbara declined to write to ask Wentworth home. She offered to leave Chilworth herself; indeed, entreated to be allowed to do so. That Mrs. Wilbraham would not permit. Then she saw Coventry, and told him that for many reasons she thought he had better return to his own home, and requested his promise to be gone in a couple of hours. Having received that, she made her way back to Katherine, and with her help wrote Wentworth a cheque for £200. She was keeping up no establishment, she said, and was glad to find a way of spending her surplus income profitably.

About Easter, Wentworth, who was then in Rome, wrote again. This time his letter was addressed to Barbara herself. He asked her if she had changed her mind, and would marry him. Barbara refused in a few decided words, on which Wentworth immediately wrote to his mother, enclosing Barbara's letter, and saying that as under these circumstances he could not come home, would she send him some money?—he would go somewhere—he hardly knew where. This was intended to be despairing, but in reality he was resolved to go to Norway with his yachting friends, and anticipated much pleasure. He was very much in love with Barbara, but was quite happy to wait until she became reasonable, so long as pleasurable ways of spending the time continued to present themselves, and he was not asked to wait too long. He did go to Norway, and wanted many a cheque while there. Mrs. Wilbraham did not grudge the money, but life was going, the son she most loved would not come home, and Coventry came rather frequently. What if he were to carry away Barbara from Chilworth, and from her beloved Wentworth? Something must be done. With her own pen she wrote:

'Wentworth, you do not come to Chilworth; your brother Coventry does: he is here now. Do you wish to be supplanted by him? Are you content to resign Barbara without a struggle? It is more than a year since you were here; he has been here often. Take warning, dear.'

At last Mrs. Wilbraham succeeded in touching Wentworth.

'Mother,' he wrote, 'your letter fills me with anxiety. You say Coventry is frequently at Chilworth, and is there now. If that is the case, I can't come; but I never will resign Barbara to anyone—least of all to that self-opinionated prig Coventry. I wish you would do something to part them. Couldn't you and Barbara go somewhere—to some pleasant place, I mean, where I could join you? Come alone; don't bring that lady-help of yours with you. If you and I were alone with Barbara, I think we might manage her; but not if you bring that last evil invention with you—'

'O! my dear Katherine, I have made you read that!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham. She was obliged to ask Katherine to read her son's letters, but had not expected anything personal in this. 'I am

so distressed—don't be offended. He does not know you as I do. That is a very good idea of his—that about our going from home, I mean. I will go somewhere at once. Harrogate would be an excellent place. Run and tell Barbara to pack for six weeks, and send Egerton to me.'

'But Mr. Coventry is here! You won't go while he is here?'

'Oh yes, I will. Will you go and pack your things?'

'Please, leave me at home. I had much rather not go.'

'That's because Wentworth said something you don't like; but he does not know you. You must go—I can't do without you. You will read to me while Barbara and Wentworth are together. I expect that she will be quite delighted to see him again; I have no doubt she is tired of behaving so ill. Katherine, do you know why she has made so many difficulties about accepting him?'

'She did not love him enough—she was afraid he was unsteady,' was Katherine's answer to this odd appeal.

'Of course he is unsteady—we all know that; but it is only because he is unhappy about her. She refuses him whenever he offers to her—oh yes, he is anything but what he ought to be, and that's what makes her conduct so bad! It will be a fearful stigma on her if she ruins a fine young fellow like that! Don't you think so?'

'No, really——' began Katherine, but Mrs. Wilbraham cut her short at once:

'If you are resolved not to see this in the same light that I do, do not speak about it at all. I detest talking to people who don't agree with me; I never do it. Besides, we must pack. It is eleven now, and I believe there is a train at two—we will go by that.'

'Wait till to-morrow,' said Katherine, who pitied Coventry and Barbara.

'Oh no—I won't!'

'We shall never get off,' thought Katherine; but for once Mrs. Wilbraham was ready, and at two o'clock they had said good-bye to Coventry, and were seated in the first of the three trains which a cross-country journey compelled them to use. At the first junction, Barbara, who was the practical one of the party, proposed that they should telegraph to one of the hotels in Harrogate to prepare rooms for them. The Cleveland was the one they chose. That done, Mrs. Wilbraham slipped a surreptitious shilling into Katherine's hand, and bade her telegraph to Wentworth to join them there. After which, she basked in the sense of being a woman of business.

At the next junction, by way of beginning to take an interest in the place to which they were bound, they bought a Harrogate paper.

'I wonder whether anyone whom we know is there,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'When I am at home I like to see no one; but when I go to a gay place, I must say I like to be gay. Barbara, read the list of visitors aloud to me.'

Barbara, who was anything but happy at being so suddenly torn away from home and from him she best loved, took the paper reluctantly, and could only make a faint effort to sympathize in her aunt's wish to find friends.

'Let me read it,' said Katherine; and finding Barbara glad to resign it to her, she began to read a string of names. One followed another, and possessed little interest for Mrs. Wilbraham, who soon tired of listening to them.

'Don't let us afflict ourselves with so many columns of these,' said she. 'Turn to the Cleveland, dear, that is our hotel; and, after all, the people who are staying there are those of whom we shall see the most. Go on, dear. What is the matter? Can't you find it?'—she said this because Katherine was long in beginning.

She really was long.

'Come, dear,' again said Mrs. Wilbraham, 'all the hotels are put together—at least, they used to be in my young days; begin at the beginning, and let us have the names of everyone at our own.'

"Cleveland Hotel—Mr. Nathaniel Hackblock, Mrs. Hackblock, Mr. Roger Hackblock, and suite;" and having read those names, Katherine stopped.

'Read on, dear; you don't mean to say that no one else is in the hotel but those people with the break-jaw name you have just read? I shall be curious to see them, I am sure—won't you?'

'Katherine looks ill,' said Barbara, taking the paper from her; 'I'll read the rest.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'The thorns that pierce most deep are prest
Only the closer to the breast;
To dwell on them is now relief,
And tears alone are balm to grief.'

LANDOR.

'KATHERINE, you miss a great deal by not going to the *table-d'hôte*. I wish you would, if only for the sake of seeing those Hackblocks. Oddly enough, I found myself sitting next them the first night we came, or I might have never made them out. He is a great rough-looking man, with a face and head like a stubble-field with his badly cut hair and ill-trimmed beard; his features are rough, too—he is rather like Carlyle without his brains; and as for Mrs. Hackblock, I must describe her. She is a pallid, meagre, upright, vinegary woman, thin-blooded, and cold-hearted! She and her husband are just the kind of people I most hate; sawdusty, gritty, husky people, without one spark of poetry in them. Perhaps the Harrogate Water may make them nicer. They are always drinking it.'

Ever since Katherine had come to Harrogate, which was now nearly a week, she had been longing to tell Mrs. Wilbraham what a

strong reason she had for desiring to avoid the Hackblocks. She had confided it to Barbara, who had at once said :

‘Do not let aunt know one word of this. It is always impossible to tell how she will take a thing. Say nothing to her unless she begins to talk of them. There may be no need to tell her—I mean, they may be on the very point of leaving the place.’

There was some truth in this ; but now that their names had been mentioned, Katherine could not help saying :

‘Dear Mrs. Wilbraham, I ought to tell you that I asked you to let me stay away from the *table-d’hôte* because of those very people—I could not bear to meet them. My father and Mr. Hackblock were partners in business ; both Mr. and Mrs. Hackblock were always very kind to me—that is, until I behaved ill to them. I behaved very ill to them.’

‘Did you—did you really ? Oh, I am really so glad !’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham heartily.

Barbara might well affirm that there was no knowing how her aunt might take a thing ! They had pelted her with facts, assailed her with statistics, and showed polite contempt for all that she held most dear ; but they were completely unlike anyone she had ever seen before, and she had a kind of distorted pleasure in being with them, and in studying characters so completely out of the range of her experience.

‘You are not crying, darling ?’ said she, for something like a sob from Katherine had followed her own exclamation of joy.

It was not often that Katherine gave anyone the opportunity of detecting her in such an act of weakness, but to-day her nerves were overstrained.

‘I ought to cry—I behaved so badly I ought to tell you all about it—and I will ; but they did take such a terrible revenge !’

‘Just like them ! I should have expected it. They are both as hard as the nether mill-stone ! I never saw two such blocks of granite ! I am curious to see the son—you have seen him, no doubt. He was here last week, but has gone away to Manchester or Sheffield, or some of those money-making places for a few days, but is to return soon.’

‘I hope I shall escape seeing him. I will tell you everything,’ said Katherine. ‘It means telling you the story of my whole life, but it is not long. You won’t mind my crying a little now and then, for it is very painful.’

‘I mind you crying very much, darling. Why should you be made unhappy ? I’d rather see every one of the Hackblocks annihilated than have you distressed in the very least ; indeed, I almost think that I’d like to see them annihilated anyhow—what good do they do ? What can be the object of suffering such people to exist ?’

‘I ought to tell you.’

‘There is no “ought” about it, and no need ! I quite understand

that whatever you did you were in the right, and nothing you can say will make me more convinced of that than I am already.'

'Oh no, don't say that! I was wrong—very wrong, but I do not think that they were quite right.'

'I am sure they were not! I won't be told about it now, though. In two or three years' time you shall tell me; it will trouble you less to talk of it then.'

'I am afraid time will make very little difference in that.'

'Oh yes, it will; besides, I had rather not know it now. I like studying those people, knowing nothing about them but what I can find out for myself.'

'They may meet me and find out that I am living with you, and take an opportunity of telling you their side of the story; and you might say that the facts were much worse than you expected.'

'I? Katherine, how dare you say such a thing! I don't go by facts; I go by faces. You have a good, beautiful, honest face, and it is a sign that you have a noble nature. Even if a girl with a face like yours does do something terribly wrong, she is quite certain to come right again. Now I could believe in any bad story against your Hackblocks!'

'“My” Hackblocks! If I were to meet them they would not so much as say one word to me!'

This prediction was more than verified that very day. Katherine had hitherto been able to avoid them; but that same afternoon she and Mrs. Wilbraham were going downstairs together, when a door opened and Mrs. Hackblock came out. Katherine saw her, and faltered so that the arm on which Mrs. Wilbraham was leaning must have trembled perceptibly. It was in vain to attempt to escape. Mrs. Hackblock's dress was clay-coloured, so was her bonnet, and her face was much the same. Her dull eyes rested on Katherine, and not even the emotion of seeing her thus so unexpectedly and suddenly took from or added one tint to her wan complexion. All that she did was to recoil a little, and perhaps there was a shade of nervousness in her voice as she said:

'I was just going to say something to you, Mrs. Wilbraham, but no doubt I shall see you later;' and then she vanished noiselessly as she had come.

'Hateful cold creature!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham. 'What would move her to show any feeling? Would anything?'

'Yes. She was once very angry with me.'

'But not in a grand, passionate way that one could respect. She was cold and ironical, I am sure. Whenever my eyes fall on that woman I find myself repeating good old Webster's lines:

“As in this world there are degrees of evils,
So in this world there are degrees of devils.”

Such a woman as that would provoke me to murder.'

'She was more in the right than I was,' replied Katherine humbly.

Mrs. Wilbraham made a gesture of impatience as she seated herself in her carriage, for all this had been said while slowly going downstairs ; and there the matter ended, for she had other things to think of which touched her more closely. Chief among these was Wentworth, her beloved young prodigal. As soon as he had succeeded in separating Barbara and Coventry, he had begun to make difficulties about coming to Harrogate. He very much wished to do so, he said, but could not possibly yield to his desire unless Barbara sent him some message which showed that she wished to see him. Barbara refused to send any such message, naturally feeling that if she did it would imply that she had changed her mind. Mrs. Wilbraham was bitterly offended with her, and bade her keep out of her sight as much as possible, and made Katherine's life a burden to her with never-ending reproaches and complaints.

'I blame you, Katherine. I blame you almost as much as Barbara, for you have a good head and she has not, so you could persuade her to love Wentworth if you liked. I know you could, but I really believe you too prefer Coventry.'

'I am afraid I do,' said Katherine honestly. 'You know yourself how hard it is to control liking.'

'No, I know nothing of the kind ! I have always loved Wentworth best ! I'll write and tell Coventry to keep away from Chilworth,' said Mrs. Wilbraham angrily. 'I'll not have everyone preferring him to Wentworth ! Wentworth is infinitely superior. Coventry only appears to more advantage because he is so much more equable. Wentworth is a genius, and that ought to compensate for everything.'

Katherine could not bring herself to assent to this. Not one spark of anything approaching to genius had she ever seen in Wentworth. Mrs. Wilbraham seemed conscious of her difficulty, and added :

'Yes, he is a genius. Poor dear, if he were but happy in his love-affairs, he would settle down and do something really great. I know he would. His mind is in a turmoil now ; he can't do anything. Barbara ought to be careful not to go too far ; not for worlds, were I in her place, would I run the risk of living in history as the girl who had an evil influence on the early life of a great man. I never read the life of Keats without hurling a few disagreeable epithets at that woman who seems to have played such a cruel part in it. I don't know what she did, I am sure ; but she did not do her best to make him happy. She never knew what a great man he was, and you and Barbara know just as little about Wentworth. For my part, I'd have the path of a young genius entirely paved with the bodies of people who would gladly lie down and die so that he might step along smoothly over them—figuratively of course, but literally too, if there was any occasion for it.'

'All very pleasant for the geniuses. However, I believe their paths are very often paved in the way you wish. You do not often

hear of a man enjoying his honours and rewards in the company of the wife by whose help he fought the battle which gained them. She has generally died some years before, and is supposed to have fallen a victim to consumption ; and he has a new one who is young and pretty.' Katherine spoke rather bitterly, for she was thinking of Frank and her dear little friend Nancy.

' "Supposed to have fallen a victim to consumption." What do you mean ?

' I mean, of course, that she has died of the strain, which has been much harder on her than on him. I am thinking of a dear friend of mine who is married to a genius—that's why I say so much. Poor little thing, she has stood between him and troubles of all kinds, and never so much as allowed him to suspect their existence ; and besides that, she has always had to share his troubles.'

' Well, that is quite right ; that's what she came into the world to do. You don't want to hold up your friend as an object of pity, do you ?

' In some respects, I do—when she dies, I mean. It is so hard to die just when everything is beginning to be worth living for.'

' Very hard, if she does not see that her work is done, and that by her help her husband has made a name in the great world ; not hard at all, if that is evident.'

Katherine sighed, for to her it seemed hard anyhow. She did not like to think of the young, new wife whom Frank might perhaps marry, and who would be told that she was loved as no woman had ever been loved before, while poor little Nancy might even be half forgotten.

' Don't let us think of painful things,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. ' I never do. I have made up my mind to send Barbara away from Chilworth if she refuses to accept Wentworth. I don't care to have anyone living with me who does not love me ; and she can't love me, or she would marry him.'

Katherine was accustomed to Mrs. Wilbraham's sweet unreasonableness ; nevertheless this took her by surprise, and she looked her amazement.

' My dear, yes, it is true ! The boy is as like me as he can well be—he is my son, and so he must be.'

' And Mr. Coventry ?

' He is the exception that proves the rule. Barbara need not set her affections on him. I'll give her six months to know her own mind, and at the end of that time she shall either accept Wentworth or go. She has had a happy home with me for fifteen years ; and if I have to send her away, I shall feel that she has all the time been unworthy of it.'

' Is it right to control a woman in such matters ?

' No, not if she is a clever one. Barbara is not clever, and I am.'

Again Katherine's voice was raised in her friend's behalf, but Mrs. Wilbraham silenced her in a moment, by saying :

‘If you differ from me in opinion, my dear, say no more. I never talk to anyone on any subject where there is the probability of disagreement! It would be a waste of time, for I defy anyone to influence me! You will know what an impossibility that is, when you have been with me longer. What a magnificent sky! Even a disagreeable attempt to persuade me to change my mind on a point on which I am decided, could hardly vex me with such a sky as that to look at. Still, I won’t have my enjoyment of it interfered with by any more unpleasant conversation. Katherine, I insist on your silence! I forbid you to open your lips again until I speak!’

The neighbourhood of Harrogate is beautiful on all sides. They were driving over a fine open moor, and above them in the heavens were huge piled-up masses of rapidly moving cumulus clouds. White as driven snow, or silvery in the sunlight, and dazzling pure against the background of bright blue, which was hid one moment and revealed the next, they sped rapidly across the sky. Mrs. Wilbraham’s eyes would not let her see one hundredth part of the beauty of their forms, as they combined and recombined in such tumultuous haste. Were they engaged in fierce battle, and struggling again and again to present a new front to some great and all-powerful enemy? All-powerful in those distant regions, but whose existence could be but dimly guessed at by mortals, and still more dimly by the poor lady whose feeble eyes were now turned heavenward in such unbounded admiration. She had brought her own carriage and horses to Harrogate. Her coachman well knew her ways, and on the first sign of her being really interested in anything, he always stopped his horses until he received a signal from her that he might drive on again. He had stopped now. It would have been as much as his place was worth not to do so at the first hint that she wished it, or to show one sign of impatience if she kept him too long. She was too cross with Katherine to call on her for sympathy in the happiness she was enjoying, so the poor tired girl, whose heart was so sad about so many things, and who was smarting under the pain of seeing Mrs. Hackblock, was left for a few minutes in very doubtful peace. Little enough rest or peace fell to the lot of anyone who lived with Mrs. Wilbraham, and yet everyone had more than poor Katherine. At night they were liable to be aroused whenever the heavenly bodies seemed to be doing anything irregular, and by day Mrs. Wilbraham’s mind was always in a ferment of zeal to do something to help this great cause, or advance the fortunes of that deserving man, or perhaps to recast the lot of this fellow-creature, or entirely remould the character of another. ‘Baleful activity’ were the profane words chosen by Coventry Carew to describe his mother’s strongest characteristic; and to the weary women who spent their lives in serving her, they certainly seemed appropriate. Katherine’s patience was often severely tried, and so was her health, but she was always good and gentle.

'I could not behave well to my own dear father, who had a claim on me,' thought she; 'let me try to do so to some one who has no claim whatsoever.' And this was the key to her whole conduct at Chilworth.

She was tired now—much too tired to be able to look at a fine sky with any definite enjoyment. To drive with Mrs. Wilbraham, indeed, involved some hard labour; for not only did she insist on walking up every hill, but if in unknown roads or lanes, she would at every turn get out of the carriage and run round the corner to see if a hill were coming; or she sent Katherine on in front, and if a high hill were there, they tried a new lane, until a new hill presented itself; and all the while they turned and returned, Katherine had to listen to Mrs. Wilbraham's emphatically expressed opinion that the Koran inculcated a far higher morality than the Bible, for it insisted on the duty of showing mercy to animals, whereas the Bible did not. Mrs. Wilbraham's heart was always aching for animals, and her voice always raised in their behalf; and, to do her justice, nearly always with reason.

Katherine had now been more than a year at Chilworth, and knew the evil as well as the good of her dear old friend's character. She lay back in the carriage now, half-resting, half wondering whether so many months of close companionship with anyone so odd as Mrs. Wilbraham was, would end by making her odd too. Was she growing like her now? She must be, or why had she not observed that the coachman had been making very cunningly concealed little signals to her for a long time? He was holding up his watch so that she could see the time, and it was dangerously near the hotel dinner-hour, while they were still three or four miles from Harrogate. The coachman looked imploringly at Katherine—he dared not remind his mistress of this; but some little meal of his own took place at the same time, and the consciousness of this sharpened his sense of punctuality. Katherine had been told to hold her tongue, so she dared not disobey. The sky was still most beautiful—it was not at all likely that Mrs. Wilbraham would call any earthly circumstance to mind for many a minute to come.

At last, after what seemed a very long time, Katherine heard a deep sigh of happiness, and the next moment felt her hand taken by the old lady, who grasped it affectionately, and said:

'It has been too beautiful! Oh, how I do thank God for this sight! My dear, I am rather afraid I spoke unkindly to you a short while since. What I have just seen has made me so happy that I would not for worlds feel that a thought of pain remains in your mind in consequence of any words of mine. Forget them, darling, if they hurt you. I love you, and I have done so ever since I first saw your face.'

'Thank you,' replied Katherine warmly; 'but, dear Mrs. Wilbraham, do love Barbara too, and be kind to her.' For she could

not but remember that Barbara had been left alone in the hotel that fine afternoon because it ruffled Mrs. Wilbraham to see the face of a person who was acting in opposition to her.

‘Certainly ; but then she must be kind to me,’ was Mrs. Wilbraham’s answer.

There was a substratum of very hard grit in that lady’s composition.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘To seik het water beneith cauld ice,
Surely it is a great folie.’

Ballad of Johnnie Armstrong.

DINNER was more than half over before Mrs. Wilbraham, accompanied by her niece Barbara, who had waited for her, took her place at table. Mrs. Hackblock looked round when she saw them come in together, and was so relieved to find that they had not brought Katherine with them, that she was able to let her mind dwell in comfort on the fact that people who pay hotel prices for their dinner ought to be punctual.

‘I was beginning to think that you were not coming to-night, Mrs. Wilbraham,’ said she, when she had exhausted her subject of meditation.

Mrs. Wilbraham very much resented the perpetual use Mrs. Hackblock made of her surname. She considered it a breach of manners, but she turned her lovely soft eyes and delicate face to that lady, and said mildly :

‘Yes, I am late. I was afraid I should be. We have been out rather too long.’

‘Oh, I am very glad, Mrs. Wilbraham, that it is only because of that. I was so afraid that you might perhaps be feeling rather uncomfortable about having to sit next me—I mean—because of that meeting we had on the stairs this afternoon when you had that young—but I’ll say what I have to say about it afterwards.’

And having uttered this with much hesitation, Mrs. Hackblock looked down persistently on her plate, while Mrs. Wilbraham, who detested all familiarity, by which term she designated this interference with what she might be supposed to like or dislike, or think or feel, gazed in surprise and wonder and gentle repugnance on the grim angular lady by her side, who would never have commanded a hearing from such a person as herself at all, had they not met at the *table d’hôte* of an hotel to which she had come with the intention of studying odd characters.

There was a dance that evening at the ‘Cleveland,’ and many of the visitors at the other hotels came to it. Barbara was dancing. Mrs. Wilbraham, dressed in pretty silk and soft lace, and looking a serene and beautiful type of picturesque old age, was looking on, or occasionally stealing a glance at some trees which stood out darkly

against the late evening sky, and could be seen from her sofa, and seen with all the more enjoyment because neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hackblock were present. At length a lady came in, whom by her parchment-coloured complexion and general abnegation of all colour in her attire Mrs. Wilbraham had no difficulty in recognising as the lady in question. She looked nervously but sternly around, satisfied herself that Katherine was not there, and then made a daring plunge between the ranks of dancers, and having crossed the room in safety, dropped on to the sofa where Mrs. Wilbraham was sitting. That lady was in a delicious reverie, and disliked being disturbed.

'We are going to leave Harrogate to-morrow morning, Mrs. Wilbraham,' observed Mrs. Hackblock. 'Before I go, I really should like just to ask you if that girl I saw with you this afternoon has talked to you about her relations with my family. If she has, I should like to set you right on two or three points on which you have probably been entirely misinformed by her.'

'She has told me nothing, so no setting right is required,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, who was irritated by the expression.

'She has told you nothing! You must have noticed that I had a strong objection to seeing her. Do you mean to say that you let her off without asking an explanation?'

'I refused to listen! I did not want her to tell me anything.'

'Perhaps you were right, Mrs. Wilbraham. She would not have told you the truth; at least, not if she has any wish to stay with you.'

'Of course she wishes to stay with me,' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, who was extremely angry at the 'if;' 'and what's more, I have a great wish to keep her.'

'Oh! then allow me to inform you that you would not—at least, I presume you would not—if you were aware of her true character. Will you let me tell you what I know of her—I mean, describe her conduct to my family?'

'Yes, if you like.'

'Mrs. Wilbraham,' remarked Mrs. Hackblock suspiciously, 'why are you willing to hear this from me, when you say yourself that you would not let that girl tell it to you?'

'Because I saw that it would be painful to her to tell it. I see that it will be a great pleasure to you.'

'A pleasure! I can only say that it was a very bitter experience! Her father was in my husband's father's office. He was a poor boy when he first went; but little by little the old gentleman went so far that at last he took him into partnership, and he was actually all but on the same level as my husband. Then we allowed our son—our only son—to ask Miss Carey (the girl you have with you) in marriage; and when they became engaged, I remember how happy we were about it.'

'I don't wonder!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham heartily; 'I should think any family might be too glad to have a chance of getting such

a beautiful, clever, delightful girl for their son. Was he at all equal to her ?

This was almost too much for Mrs. Hackblock. She drew herself up haughtily ; never before had she had the least experience of the cool and semi-unconscious insolence of members of families who rightly or wrongly think that they belong to the upper classes of society, and have therefore a prescriptive right to indulge in the utterance of any thought which may happen to enter into their minds, and who cannot imagine that those to whom they are spoken have any particular feelings which can be wounded.

'Well, he was your son, of course,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, who was too quick to be quite so obtuse as some of these great folks, and too kindly not to make a mighty effort to penetrate into and sympathize with some of the details and peculiarities of the '*infiniment petit*.' 'He was your son, and she was engaged to him, you say. I don't know him, but I do know her, and I hope you don't mind my saying that he was very fortunate to secure her.'

'Secure her ! I should like to know how he or anyone else was to secure such a light, frivolous creature as that ? All the time that she was engaged to him, Mrs. Wilbraham, she was in love with another man. She wrote just as many love-letters to him as she did to my son. She had appointments with her other lover every day, and did all kinds of disgraceful things. You quite understand, I hope, that I do not want to do her any harm, only I think it is right that you, Mrs. Wilbraham, who seem to take such a warm interest in her, should know her true character.'

'Your son should have broken off with her if he was not satisfied.'

'He did as soon as he knew what a wretch she was ; but it was months before he discovered that. Of course he broke off with her, and we turned her father out of the business too.'

'Ruined him, I suppose. Is that why he committed suicide ?'

'Perhaps it was. I don't know. I am sure I never thought he would do such a thing as commit suicide—never ! No one could have foreseen it. He was always such an unassuming man—not a man of that kind at all.'

And as Mrs. Hackblock said this, she smoothed down some fringe on her dress which would not lie straight, and looked full of reflective calm.

'Well, surely the family has been sufficiently punished !' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, after a pause. 'Her father was ruined, and committed suicide ; her mother died ; Miss Carey herself has to work for her living. What more would you have ?'

'I have no desire to do her any harm,' replied Mrs. Hackblock, with a slight consciousness that it was not altogether noble of her to insist on squeezing out the two or three last drops of her store of gall. 'I don't want to stand in the way of her earning a living—it's not that. I am thinking of you—I have a regard for you.'

‘Oh, thank you!’ said Mrs. Wilbraham, with a gratitude which was evidently imperfect. ‘I am really very much obliged to you; but, after all, it is so very much more important that you should have some regard for her than for me.’

Mrs. Wilbraham’s accent was haughty, for she was horrified at the idea of being viewed with regard by a person of such attenuated proportions, mental and physical, as Mrs. Hackblock.

‘Yes,’ continued Mrs. Hackblock, quite unconscious of the offence she was giving to the proud and sensitive lady, ‘I have a great regard for you, and then I am so sorry for you. You are very nearly blind, and see so very little of what is going on about you.’

Mrs. Wilbraham was writhing under these repeated attacks of what she considered perfectly unpardonable personality.

‘It would never do for you to keep a girl like that in your service; why, she is quite clever enough to deceive a woman with all her senses about her, let alone you. I am only alluding to your eyes, you know, Mrs. Wilbraham, when I say “senses.” I don’t at all mean to imply that your understanding is not quite up to the average; for it is, and anyone can see that it is!’

Mrs. Wilbraham felt more and more animated to slaughter, and yet she, an ardent student of character, could not help snatching more of the ‘fearful joy’ of dipping down lower and yet lower into a stratum of malicious vulgarity, deeper and richer than any which had hitherto been offered to her inspection. It was most horrible, but she would never have such a chance again! She let this pass in silence, therefore.

Mrs. Hackblock observed her silence, and flattered herself that she had produced an effect.

‘How would it suit a ladylike person like you, Mrs. Wilbraham, to be disturbed by the sound of voices quite late in the night, or, as some people prefer to call it, early in the morning, and have to go down into your sitting-room to see what could be the matter, and find that girl alone with a man who was madly in love with her, though he must have known that she was engaged to my son—for that’s what happened to me! Such a disgraceful story you never heard! She had gone to Scotland with us, and he had got to know where we had gone, and had followed us about from place to place, until at last he found us in a pretty little country inn; and then what did he do but disguise himself as a waiter, and wait on us all through dinner, just to see her! We—that is, my husband and I—had of course no suspicion that anything so disgraceful was being enacted under our very eyes—and we can see. You, with your poor blind eyes, would never have seen anything wrong at all, even if it had been much more visible than it was. Well, he waited on us at dinner, and made his arrangements with her somehow, for at night they had a long interview in our sitting-room, and at three in the morning I, who had been fancying I heard voices for some time,

went down and caught them. Can you imagine such a thing, Mrs. Wilbraham?—he was actually kissing her when I entered the room! He was the lover I told you about just now—the man she preferred to my son Roger; and she looked as happy as a queen just because he was with her!

‘Poor dear girl! Go on, Mrs. Hackblock, please do! It is so interesting! I am so fond of a good love-story! Followed her all the way from London, did you say? Disguised himself as a waiter, and waited on you at your hotel? How very ingenious of him! Do tell me some more!’

And Mrs. Wilbraham, who up to this time had been lying back on the sofa, and doing her best to let all that was disagreeable in Mrs. Hackblock’s ways and words pierce her only through a veil of insensibility, sat up and looked in her companion’s face with an obvious desire to hear much more.

‘Madam, you astonish me!’ exclaimed Mrs. Hackblock coldly. ‘I must say you astonish me! I expected you to be shocked!’

‘I am a little shocked, of course. I don’t deny that the thing was very unlike what one is accustomed to; but love excuses everything!’

‘She was sitting up when everyone else was in bed! Alone with a man whom no one knew but herself! Do you think anything can excuse that?’

‘It was late; but I suppose they couldn’t very well see each other at any other time. Don’t dwell so much on that part of it; they loved each other—love sanctifies everything.’

‘Good heavens!’ ejaculated Mrs. Hackblock piously, if not politely. ‘To talk like that at your age! You really ought to know better.’

She tried to rise and go to her chamber, but her knee-joints had stiffened, perhaps in horror, and she could not accomplish her purpose. She had, during this conversation, been more than once so deeply offended by Mrs. Wilbraham’s behaviour, that nothing but the desire to do Katherine some really permanent harm had kept her from hurrying indignantly out of the room. She had, however, allowed the number of insults which had been heaped on her to accumulate to such an extent, that they had suddenly weighed her down, so that she was all but unable to move.

‘At my age, my good woman!’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, in her turn indignant also; ‘but the very highest wisdom of which age is capable is to know how to sympathize with youth; and that knowledge, I hope, I have.’

Mrs. Hackblock could not speak for astonishment and horror.

‘Who was the gentleman who was with her?’ inquired Mrs. Wilbraham, with tender interest and absolute indifference to all that had gone before.

‘You had better ask Miss Carey, if you are so anxious to know,’ replied Mrs. Hackblock crossly. Soon, however, the desire to do

harm triumphed over the much weaker feeling of any wish to maintain her own dignity, and she added :

‘Stay, I’ll tell you myself. I don’t suppose you would ever get the truth from her. He was not a man who was in any business——’

Mrs. Wilbraham was delighted—she hated business.

‘He was in no business, I say, and had no fixed employment. He just wrote plays and novels, and leading articles for papers. You can no doubt imagine the kind of thing and the kind of man, and you will understand what kind of principles a man like that would have.’

‘Really ?’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham. It was better and better ! She was a Bohemian to her heart’s core. Had she had the management of the world she would carefully have eradicated from it all but those who gave their lives to literature and art, together with well-established county gentlefolks of good family and Liberal politics. ‘What was his name ?’ she cried eagerly.

‘Lewis Barrington—not a man you will know——’

‘Lewis Barrington ! Not really ? Not the Lewis Barrington whom everybody knows ?’

‘I am sure I don’t know whether everybody knows him or not. As for this one, I know more of him than I like !’

Whether he was the Lewis Barrington of the ‘Open Secret,’ or not, he wrote and he had a good name, and therefore possessed two of the qualifications which Mrs. Wilbraham wished to lay down as generally necessary to existence. Mrs. Hackblock, of course, had no idea of all that her companion on the sofa was thinking and feeling—there was, indeed, little within herself to guide her to such knowledge ; but she saw quite enough to convince her that it was altogether in vain to try to influence such an erratic person, and that to do so was only to put herself in the way of insults, veiled and unveiled. She felt that in any case she had fought a good fight in the cause of virtue, so she rose majestically and said :

‘Madam, I wish you good-night. Miss Linley is dancing, so I won’t disturb her. Will you kindly say good-bye to her for me ? We leave Harrogate early in the morning.’

‘You are leaving Harrogate ! Oh, why are you going ?’ exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, with a touch of regret, for she could not but feel that she had derived an immense amount of amusement from the study of this woman (so to call her, for once), and that she was about to be deprived of it—a loss that she, a poor, half-blind woman, could not afford to despise.

‘We are going because my son has returned here. He came this afternoon. We would have stopped him if we had known whom you had with you as companion. My husband, however, went to meet him at the station, and told him what we had just discovered ; so Roger went to the “Denbigh” for one night, and to-morrow we are all off to Switzerland.’

'But why are you going away? I am sure this place is doing you good. You are getting quite a colour!'

Mrs. Hackblock with a colour! Was it Mrs. Wilbraham's bad eyes which made her see things in so fair a light, or was it her reluctance to part with a new toy, whose antics often pleased her, even though it still more frequently wounded her? Be that as it might, Mrs. Hackblock was so much affected by the dignified lady's condescension, that she dropped into her place on the sofa again, in order the better to answer such kind inquiries.

'So far as our own inclinations are concerned, Mrs. Wilbraham, we should very much like to stay. It's only on our son's account that we are going away. You see, we do not want to have him exposed to the risk of seeing this girl again.'

'Pooh!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, who had a burning desire to see the son of such parents. 'Don't go away on that account. It would do him no harm whatever to see her—no more harm than it has done you.'

'I don't know,' replied Mrs. Hackblock. And she did not. She did not quite understand Roger. He had behaved admirably about breaking off his engagement; had quite agreed with his parents in saying that it would be pitifully poor-spirited either to forgive Katherine or think of her again. He had kept aloof from her when she was in her greatest trouble, and had let her be stripped of everything she possessed without offering help; but still he had not behaved quite as his parents expected and wished. He had never either quoted little bitter bits of the Bible against her, or gone about with an air of subdued elation while one misfortune after another was befalling her. This had been their unvarying wont, but, alas! it had not been his; and they had more than once expressed a fear that he was still encumbered by some vestige of regard for her. They never by any chance insulted him, even in their own minds, by supposing that this feeling amounted to love; but they thought it very terrible that any remnant of interest whatsoever should survive in his mind, and not for worlds would they have him thrown with her at the 'Cleveland.' Each of them attributed Mrs. Hackblock's chance meeting with her on the stairs to a direct interposition of Providence on their behalf (to be accounted for by a perusal of the balance-sheet of the S.P.G.); they had been mercifully suffered to learn her presence in time to avert the danger. That is how they looked on it, and Roger Hackblock himself had been heartily glad to take refuge in another hotel, and to know that his father and mother would be ready to fly the place with him the first thing in the morning.

'And now I think I really must say good-night, Mrs. Wilbraham,' said Mrs. Hackblock, after a little more conversation had taken place between them. 'I shall be able to get across the room before another dance begins. I must go to bed early, for we shall have to make an early start.'

‘Good-night,’ said Mrs. Wilbraham coldly. ‘I wish you a pleasant journey.’

‘Thank you. It is certain to be pleasant, I think. I hope you, Mrs. Wilbraham, will return home stronger for being here, and find your poor eyes stronger too.’

‘Thank you, thank you; good-bye,’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham impatiently.

‘And,’ said Mrs. Hackblock, with what was meant as a parting shot, ‘if ever you find your companion, or lady-help, or whatever she is, sitting up late at night to have midnight interviews with gentlemen, please to remember that I warned you. I don’t wish anything of the kind to happen, but if it does, don’t forget I warned you.’

‘My dear lady, don’t you trouble yourself about my companion. She is a good girl, and may be thoroughly trusted. She may see whom she likes, and have her interviews, as you call them, when she likes and where she likes; I am not suspicious.’

‘But people ought to be a little suspicious. It is late now, and you and Miss Linley have been here for hours. She, in the meantime, is her own mistress. How do you know what she is doing, or whom she is seeing?’

‘But why should I know? I have no right to watch her conduct as if she were my slave.’

‘Then you think, I dare say, that when you are not there, she sits and sews, and never sees a soul?’

‘I think nothing of the kind—I know that she sees people! Why shouldn’t she? I am perfectly aware that she is talking to a gentleman now, for I saw one being shown to her sitting-room as I came downstairs. I let her have a sitting-room of her own, for she does not like to come to the public room.’

‘You are much too kind to her. It’s ridiculous to go to the expense of a sitting-room for a poor girl like that! But tell me about the gentleman—you rather frighten me; but it couldn’t be my son! What was he like? Was he a very handsome, well-made, clever-looking young man?’

‘Certainly not! He was a rather common-looking, plain, thick-set young man. I don’t think he was quite a gentleman, but I was not paying much attention.’

Mrs. Hackblock would have liked to sit down again in perfect unconcern, strong in the belief that any young man who could be described in such terms as these could not be her son Roger. But suppose it were he! suppose he had committed the imprudence of visiting that dreadful girl! ‘Common-looking,’ ‘plain,’ ‘thick-set,’ were not words which ought to be applied to him; nevertheless, she left the room at once in perturbed haste. Nothing could have shown the difference between the two ladies more clearly than this. If Mrs. Wilbraham’s ugly duckling, Wentworth, had been the

gentleman in question, and these same words had been used in reference to him, that lady would assuredly never have stirred from her sofa to cut short any inauspicious interview, but would have sat still, serene and unruffled, and absolutely certain that such a description at once proved the impossibility of her son's presence.

Up to this time, Barbara, who had seen her aunt engaged in what from a distance appeared to be pleasantly animated conversation, had not ventured to approach, for fear of interrupting it. Now that her aunt was alone, she went to her, and said :

'Aunt, are you tired of this ?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Wilbraham curtly.

She was never very kind to Barbara now, though, not being a vindictive woman by nature, she sometimes forgot that she ought to show resentment.

'I was afraid the music was rather loud for you.'

'I am not attending to it.'

'Don't the dancers worry you ? They come so close to your sofa. I wish they wouldn't ; there's room enough.'

'I don't see them—I mean they don't affect me. Barbara, leave me alone ; I am thinking !'

No more appalling communication could possibly be made by Mrs. Wilbraham to her family than that she was thinking. It always boded a large amount of active and able-bodied evil to some of them.

'What are you thinking about, aunt ?' Barbara asked, humbly and nervously.

'I can't tell you ; of something highly important—something I intend to do ; I can't tell you about it—I can't tell anyone.'

Barbara crept away with little enough heart for dancing now. She felt as if she were about to be caught up in a whirlwind of strong will, and married to her cousin Wentworth in spite of all resistance. She earnestly prayed that her aunt's energies of thought might suddenly be diverted to another object. She danced, but with a difference, and from time to time glanced fearfully at the sofa. Whenever she looked she saw the same sight—Mrs. Wilbraham sitting calmly and happily in precisely the same attitude, and with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes, which showed that she was tenderly cherishing some thought which gave her great satisfaction.

More than one person present congratulated Barbara on having such a charming relative. More than one partner declared that he had never seen such a perfect realization of placid and beautiful old age, and that not one of Sir Joshua's pictures could show dignified repose in a more attractive aspect. Barbara felt but a shivering gratitude to them. What could her aunt be thinking about ? Mrs. Wilbraham sat for another hour, though hitherto she had always declared even half the time unbearable under such circumstances.

Oddly enough, she had not the slightest desire to know the result of Mrs. Hackblock's pursuit of her son ; she sat quietly on her sofa, perfectly happy and silent. A little good-natured old lady had gone and sat down by her, pitying her loneliness, and intending to be kind and civil to her ; but she had been too much awed by her manifest abstraction to dare to break in on it, and was now pleasantly occupied in admiring the courtly old lady. Mrs. Wilbraham did not even know that she was there. Mrs. Wilbraham, in fact, was so delighted with her own thoughts, that she could attend to nothing else. An idea had entered her mind which perfectly fascinated her.

'Yes, I will do it,' said she ; 'I am resolved to do it !'

CHAPTER XXXV.

'How hard it is to hide the sparks of Nature !'

Cymbeline.

THAT same evening while Barbara was dancing, Katherine was alone in the sitting-room with which Mrs. Wilbraham's kindness had furnished her. She was enjoying a welcome rest from the strain of having to seem contented at least, if not happy. She was not exactly mentally weary of acting this part, for she accepted the duty of seeming cheerful and thoroughly satisfied with her daily life as the major part of her penance, but the effort to carry this out was sometimes an almost unbearable tax on her physical strength. After hours of humouring Mrs. Wilbraham, and of listening with unremitting sympathy to imaginary or purely sentimental grievances, while her own heart was filled with one universal ache, left by cruel blows dealt her by the past, it was a mighty relief to Katherine to feel that she was safe for an hour or so, and might bolt her door and indulge in grief which at all other times she was bound to suppress. She knew it was wrong to do this, and contrary to the spirit of her vow. She hoped soon to be strong enough to control herself entirely, but that time had not yet come.

Katherine had bolted her door, and was crying. Some one knocked. She was afraid that it was Barbara come to say that Mrs. Wilbraham wanted something.

'Come in,' said she hastily, drying her eyes as she spoke. She had forgotten that the door was bolted. No one came, so she got up and opened it. She saw a gentleman standing outside—one whom she had never thought to see again. Roger Hackblock was there ; he looked much older and more grave and stern than she had ever seen him before. She trembled so that she almost felt as if she should fall, and said faintly :

'Oh, Roger ! you here ?'

He answered firmly enough :

'I was told that this was your room, and as I wanted to see you,

I came. Let us go inside. There are so many people about, that we can't talk here.'

She yielded to his wish without a thought of opposition. She had treated this man so ill, that so much grace as this might well be accorded him.

'I know people would say that it was very foolish and wrong of me ever to come near you again, Kitty,' said he, and his voice lingered almost affectionately on the word 'Kitty;' 'but you see I have come—I can't help it. I used to be very fond of you; I don't remember when it was that I began to think so much of you, but I expect it was when I was quite a little fellow. It is a strange thing to care for a girl so long as that, and makes one feel quite differently for her from what one ever could for anyone else. I am sure if any girl I hadn't known so long had treated me as ill as you have done, I should never go near her; but somehow I do not feel happy when I think of not being friends with you. You don't speak, Kitty. I suppose you want me to get all I have to say said, before you begin?'

Katherine had tried to speak once, and now tried again, but her words seemed frozen. It was so strange to see Roger there, so strange to hear him speak with so much feeling; she had never been so astonished in her life.

'What I want to say is this, and I say it quite honestly—I mean it, I assure you—and you may believe me. If you will say that you are sorry for behaving so ill to me, and assure me that you will never see that man again, I will love you just as much as ever I did; and we will be engaged again—stop a minute,' said he, for Katherine, galled by the air of condescension with which he spoke, seemed about to interrupt him. 'Don't answer yet—I have more to say, and I want you to hear it first. If you will just say this—don't be angry with me for asking it: a man can't quite cast all proper pride to the winds, you know—well, if you will say it, you shall never be reminded by me that you have apologized; and what's more, I'll never reproach you with the past. I give you my word of honour that I'll never so much as name it. Will you say you are sorry?'

'To say I am sorry is not half strong enough—Roger, I shall never forgive myself; I repent it every hour of my life.'

'Stop, stop, stop!' cried he, coming nearer to her, and putting out his hand as if to take hers; but somehow hers strayed away in quite a different direction. 'What can a man want more?'

She retreated a step or two, and said:

'Roger, you must not want more from me than this; but so far as owning that I did wrong goes, if it is any satisfaction to you to hear that I know I did, and am thoroughly miserable about it, you shall hear it, for I am——'

'Never mind about that,' said Roger awkwardly. He was leaning against a corner of the mantelpiece, and nervously fingering the ornaments, which looked much too frail for his massive square-tipped

fingers. 'Don't tell me about that. I want you to be sorry and very sorry, and to say that you are ; but as to your being so miserable, I don't like it, and can't bear to hear you talk of it ! Let us say no more about the past, Kitty. We were engaged before, let us be engaged again. I will love you as much as ever—nay, far more—I will make my mother treat you properly. Only one thing you must do—you must give me a solemn promise never to see that man again. I suppose, Kitty, you never do see him now ?'

Katherine could have shrieked aloud in her agony and dismay ; this cold-blooded, too-secure lover of hers was trampling backwards and forwards over every wound of her heart and soul with dull plodding unconcern.

'I never see him,' cried she ; 'I never see anyone whom I love. Roger, be silent about these things. You insist on speaking of things of which I do not so much as allow myself to think.'

'I won't talk of things that vex you,' said he, 'if you will only tell me what they are ; but we must talk pretty openly, or how are we ever to get things settled ?'

'What things ? What are we to get settled ?' asked she. She seemed strangely unable to follow his meaning.

'Get our engagement renewed and put on its old footing. That's what I came to do, of course. I have tried living without you long enough, and have found it none too comfortable ! What are you shaking your head about, and going on in that way for, all the time that I am talking ? I wish you would be more like yourself. You make me think that you are not pleased to see me back again.'

Katherine did not know Roger. All his old hardness and stolid self-satisfaction seemed so much less visible, and he was now like an affectionate and rather humble schoolboy, who laboured under a difficulty in expressing himself.

'Roger,' she said, very earnestly, 'you must give me up at once and for ever.'

'I must ? I don't see why, I am sure !'

Not for one moment could he imagine that she really did not intend to accept him.

'I never can be engaged to you again—never !'

'Nonsense, Kitty ! I imagined you might be rather hard to persuade. Of course I knew you would be afraid that I might sometimes say unpleasant things to you about the past ; but, Kitty dear, on my honour I would not. I don't let myself think disagreeable things about you even as it is. I never did think any after the first week or two ; and whenever my father and mother talk of you, I never stay to listen—I hate to hear a word against you ! They think I don't mind it, but I do.'

'I deserve all they say—I deserve more ! Roger, my life shall be spent in atoning for the past !'

'Oh, nonsense, Kitty ! that's a very poor way of spending a life.'

We must find you something better than that to do. You have made me miserable very often ; now I want you to see if you can't do the other thing, and try and make me happy. I love you—I want you to marry me—will you do it ?

'No, Roger ; I will not. I said so before ; I never can.'

'Then you must want to marry Barrington !' said he angrily ; and he left the corner of the mantelpiece, and began to pace the room. 'That's clear enough, and you need not attempt to deny it.'

'I do deny it ; I shall never marry anyone. It was very good of you to come and ask me to marry you. It will be a great comfort to me to know that you had a sufficiently good opinion of me to do it. Thank you also for saying that you do not like to hear hard things said of me. Before you go, will you say that you forgive me ?'

'Yes, I forgive you. I can say it with truth ; for I never allow myself to think of what parted us. If I did, I am not so sure that I could forgive you. But, Kitty, you can't really mean that you won't have me ? I wish you would just think seriously. I want you to marry me, and let me take you away from this life you are leading now, which is not fit for you. My mother told me that you were little better than a servant, and had to run here, there, and everywhere at the bidding of a half-clever, half-crazed old lady—that surely is not true ; or if it is, you can't like it ! Surely, putting me at the very lowest valuation, life with me would be better than that ! I am rich, Kitty—but you know all about me, and all I can give you ; and I will only say that there is nothing which I could give you, dear, that you shall not have if you will but be mine once more. You have but to say the word, and all this poverty and serving others, and pain and unhappiness, will be over.'

Katherine hid her face in her hands. He thought that she was going to yield. He had always known that she had some difficulty in giving him her entire affection. It had been no easy task to persuade her to accept him in the first instance, and more than once afterwards she had told him that she did not love him enough to marry him ; but she could surely love him now as much as she did then. And one thing now would surely make her incline more to him—she must by this time have learnt the value of money. In her youth she took riches as a matter of course ; but now that she was familiar with adversity, when golden wealth was offered her, she would surely be too wise to refuse it.

Roger Hackblock would not have been at all hurt, if she had accepted him, to find that his wealth had been a powerful inducement. He himself attached a high value to it, and could not see how anyone of any sense could do otherwise.

'Come, Kitty,' said he, for she did not reply quickly enough to please him ; 'come, dear, it is miserable for both of us until this is settled. I am sure it is better for you to accept me. I'll live where you like. I'll do everything I can to make you happy, and I am quite sure you would be happy.'

'Impossible, Roger! You must really believe what I say. I can never love you—never marry you; and yet I never liked and respected you more than I do now, when you have come to try to be kind to a poor broken-hearted girl like me. Roger, you must go. Try to think kindly of me.'

'Do you really mean that I am to go away no better off than I was when I came?' said he, pausing in his walk up and down the small hotel sitting-room, and confronting her face to face.

'You leave me better in this way. You must know that you have done something to make me happier. You have forgiven me. Roger, you are not so hard as your mother!'

'God forbid!' said he fervently, though he was much too like his mother to have any real appreciation of her hardness. 'Katherine'—he was beginning to believe in her refusal, and said Katherine now, and not Kitty—'I hope it is not fear of seeing my mother which is making you say "no" to me? She should not say cruel things to you, dear, I promise you; we would not live near her.'

'No, indeed, Roger; it is not that.'

'You can't love me,' said he sadly. 'Oh, how tired and ill you look! I know I ought to go; but I don't know when I shall see you again—never, I suppose; and I don't believe I shall ever be as fond of any other woman as I am of you!'

'Oh, Roger, yes! don't spoil your life for me! Try to love some one else, and to do your best to learn all she cares for and thinks, and to sympathize with her, and then you will be happy.'

'I understand,' said he; 'you think me a great hard, selfish fellow. I dare say I am, Kitty; but I think you might have tried to make me better. I shall never let any other woman say half so much to me as I would have let you. Well, good-bye, if it has to be; good-bye!'

He wrung her hand, and strode to the door; then he came back, and said:

'If ever you at all changed your mind, you would not be too proud to let me know it somehow or other, would you?'

'Oh no, I wouldn't; but Roger, don't expect it, for I never shall! It would be wrong to let you expect it for a moment.'

He said no more, but after one last look in her pale, tired, but always beautiful face, he left her. He did not go back to the 'Denbigh' at once, but roamed about the streets. He never knew how many times he traversed the distance between the two Harrogates—he was thinking of something very different. Some one touched his arm. It was his father, who was in search of him.

'Roger, you have not been to the Cleveland to see that girl, I hope? Your mother says you have.'

'I have; I wanted to see her, and I did see her. Stop!' he exclaimed, for he saw that his father was preparing to utter something which he himself did not choose to hear. 'I won't have a

word said against her. You need not be afraid—I shall never see her again.'

'I object to your going near her at all. It is most degrading to the family, and your mother is furious!'

'Then I'll avoid my mother for a while,' said Roger curtly; 'I don't like her when she is furious! You are going to Switzerland to-morrow; I think I'll go to Norway—Hull is very near. Good-night, father.' And Roger turned away without leaving his father an opportunity of saying more.

'I did not know the boy,' said Nathaniel Hackblock to his wife. 'He was not like himself! So short in his manner with me; he would not have one word said against her.'

'If he is so particular about that,' said Mrs. Hackblock, 'he had better keep away from me.'

He did keep away from her for weeks, and when he returned, he would not allow her to revile poor Katherine. Even he, self-engrossed and self-satisfied as he was, felt that he had missed something in life which could never be adequately replaced. Never in the whole course of Roger Hackblock's existence had he been so subdued and tender as during that interview with Katherine—never so much in love with her. He, in his own somewhat condescending fashion, loved her better than any other living creature, and continued to do so until his dying day; and though his remembrance of her was year by year thrust farther and farther back into the recesses of his heart, still it was always there. She was the companion of his youth, the only possession he had ever striven hard to obtain which had been unattainable. He never could quite understand how he had lost her, when she seemed of right to belong to him. He did not understand it better twenty years afterwards than he did on that night when he paced up and down the Harrogate streets, and wondered how she could be so blind to her own interest as to refuse him. He could see that all was over between her and Barrington, so her refusal was the more inexplicable.

She, in the meantime, sat for an hour or more where he had left her. This interview had stirred up feelings of all kinds. For her part, though it was a relief to hear him say that he had forgiven her, she would fain have been left alone to lead a new life among new people, and never hear the names of those who had played any part in the tragedy of other days. While she was thus occupied, Barbara came in.

'What are you doing, Katherine?' said she.

'Thinking, dear—only thinking.'

'For heaven's sake don't think! Aunt has been thinking hard, and I am quite sure some very bad mischief will come of it! Something bad always does happen to us all whenever she thinks.'

'No result is produced by my thinking,' said Katherine, 'but pain to myself sometimes.'

'I don't mean you to look so sad always,' said Barbara, kissing her; 'I mean you to be very happy after a while.'

Not being able to make a very hopeful answer, Katherine made none. Then she told Barbara of Roger Hackblock's visit, and that occupied some time. More than it ought to have done, for suddenly they remembered that it was the duty of one of them to go and see if Mrs. Wilbraham wanted anything, and it was now twelve o'clock.

'I was intending to make you go,' said Barbara, 'but now that you have told me about Mr. Hackblock, I think you have gone through enough to-night, so I'll go myself. Good-night.'

When Barbara entered her aunt's room, which looked into the hotel-garden, all the windows were wide open, all the blinds up, and the curtains pulled back; the table was drawn near one of the windows, and five or six wax-candles were burning on it. Mrs. Wilbraham was sitting by it; she was resting her forehead on her hand, but she raised her head when Barbara came in, and very sweet and lovable she looked.

'I hope you have not been waiting, aunt. I ought to have been with you before. I am sorry to be so late. What have you been doing?'

'Oh, I have not been wanting you, dear child. I can't do much, as you know, but I have been thinking.'

'Thinking again, aunt?' exclaimed Barbara, in renewed dismay; 'about the same thing you were thinking of before, or something different?'

'Something different—quite different, but of something so good and sensible, that I am amazed it never came into my mind before.'

Here even meek Barbara could not but smile in tender amusement, for the word 'sensible' was, in all probability, so unlikely to be appropriate as a description of any of her aunt's thoughts.

'Tell me about it, dear,' she said.

'Oh, no, Barbara, I can't do that.'

'People do say,' observed Barbara pleasantly, for she was very anxious to be on good terms with her aunt, 'people do say that thought is of no value whatsoever unless it produces action.'

'Mine has produced action,' replied Mrs. Wilbraham gaily, as she triumphantly pointed to two great square-enveloped letters lying on the table before her. 'It has produced those two letters, and they are both most important, and will, I expect, both produce important results.'

Having said this, she raised the beautiful eyes, which saw so imperfectly, most affectionately to meet those of her niece, and smiled kindly and very happily.

'It's not often that we have two good ideas on the same evening?' she added triumphantly.

'You have written those two letters yourself?' exclaimed Barbara

in astonishment. 'How could you possibly see to do it? Why did you not get one of us to write for you?'

'Because,' replied Mrs. Wilbraham mysteriously, 'it suited me better to do it myself. I lighted all the candles I could find in the room, and put on two pairs of spectacles, and then, with my eyeglass and very black ink, I did very well. You had better run away, dear; I don't want anything, and it is bedtime. Stay, you may put out some of those candles for me. I don't want so much light now that my writing is done.' So saying, she took up her letters and put them into her pocket, and said nothing more to Barbara that night, except that it was very nice to be without a maid for a while.

Next day Mrs. Wilbraham posted the two letters with her own hands. No one saw more of them than that their addresses looked rather black and blurred.

'But there is not the faintest hope of their being lost,' lamented Barbara, 'if they are ever so ill directed! They will be put into the hands of an "emergency man," and he will send them safely enough. It is such a pity! One is no doubt to Wentworth, and the other to Coventry, and both will cause misery of some kind! Aunt looked in a mischief last night. I know her face so well; she looked so sweet and innocent, poor dear! and when she does something foolish, it is so terribly foolish!'

So far as Barbara's first guess was concerned, she was right. In due course of time, Wentworth Wilbraham, then in London, wasting money, health, and time in following his own evil inclinations, and using his home-grievances as a means of extorting an unlimited supply of cheques from his indulgent and rich mother, received a letter which stimulated him to prompt action.

Mrs. Wilbraham was weary of delay. She had been doing her best to make him come to the point for nearly a year, and during that time he had constantly put her off with excuses. She disapproved entirely of the life he was leading in London and elsewhere, though she knew little enough of it, but that it seemed to require a great deal of money to keep it up.

Her eyes were failing rapidly, her life passing away. She longed to have her favourite son at home with her, leading a happy, safe life with good little Barbara to love him. If she could but prevail on him to return to Chilworth, he would be saved; but the longer he stayed away, the harder it was to make him come. She had said that it was Barbara's fault, but she began to think she had been wrong, and that Wentworth liked anything better than being in the country.

She bethought herself, too, that the only occasion on which he had seemed to be at all near coming home was when he heard that Coventry and Barbara were seeing so much of each other, and then he had at once written to announce his return. She was resolved to

use an 'innocent little stratagem.' Her romantic mind loved innocent little stratagems, even when they were not wanted, and this was wanted. She would deceive him a little for his own good. It was quite worth while, for she had no fear of Barbara's being obdurate when once the dear boy appeared. She was sure she would accept him this time. Mrs. Wilbraham's letter to Wentworth only contained a few words, but they were carefully studied :

'You are staying away *too long*, my dear boy. *Do come home!* You can't expect to win the love of a girl whom you never seem to care to see. It is not Coventry that I am afraid of *this time*, so don't imagine *that*; but be wise and come home. We shall go back on the 15th of August. For *your own sake*, let us see you *very soon* after our return—that is, if you have any love for Barbara.'

She was delighted with this letter. It was so short, and yet contained so much that would alarm him.

'He will come! he will come!' thought she. 'He is as jealous as a man can be. He will be perfectly furious at the idea of Barbara having got some other lover, and that is what I have tried to imply. Oh, how I wish I had thought of doing this before!'

The other letter was not addressed to Coventry, but to Lewis Barrington, Esq., care of F. Davenport, Esq., Gower Street, London.

Mrs. Wilbraham sent it to the Davenports because she thought they would know Mr. Barrington's address and forward it, but as, in fulfilment of his promise to Katherine, he was living with them, she could not have done better to ensure its arrival. He opened the letter with the indifference with which London people do open letters in an unfamiliar handwriting, but all indifference vanished when he had read a few lines :

'DEAR SIR,

'I am a stranger to you, but as I am well acquainted with your delightful books, I can never feel myself a stranger. They have been treasures of mine for years.

'I have heard much in your dispraise from some enemies of yours—the Hackblocks; they are also enemies of my companion and dear friend, Miss Carey. What I have heard of you from them makes me still more wishful to know you, and I trust you will not think me too unceremonious if I ask you if it would be quite impossible for me to prevail on you to pay me a visit. If you would make a halt at Chilworth some time when you are going northwards, it would give me the greatest pleasure to see you, and it would not be much out of your way. Our scenery used to be very beautiful; now its beauty is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Nevertheless, if you will favour me with a visit, I will do my best to find some unspoiled fragments beautiful enough to repay you for your kindness.

‘My invitation is given in all sincerity, and some time or other, at not too distant a date, I trust you will accept it.

‘Yours faithfully,

‘HESTER WILBRAHAM.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

‘If your mind dislike anything, obey it not a whit—we defy augury.’

Hamlet.

‘I CAN’T give any reason for it,’ said Barbara to Katherine, ‘but I do feel so afraid of going back to Chilworth. There is a satisfied calm about my aunt, an air of repressed expectation, which terrifies me. I am sure she has some project on hand which pleases her immensely, but won’t please us! Katherine, do ask her to stay here another week.’

‘Impossible!’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham, when Katherine went to her; ‘quite impossible! I have fixed the day, so I must go.’

Hereupon Barbara became still more apprehensive, for her aunt never by any chance kept any engagement she made.

The journey was safely performed; but one incident broke its monotony. They had to wait some time at a junction until a train for their own branch-line came. This time was spent by Mrs. Wilbraham on a seat on the platform, for she hated to be pent within stone walls; Katherine was sitting by her; Barbara had strayed away to a book-stall, when a long train from London came in. Some people got out; and when the confusion had subsided a little, Katherine saw a brightly dressed girl sitting in a corner of one of the carriages, and trying in all ways to summon her to the window. It was Jemima Jane of the Kensington kitchen.

Half a dozen steps took Katherine to the window. Jemima Jane seemed delighted to see her.

‘Just to think,’ said she, ‘of my very nearly not seeing you! And my carriage, that I am sitting in, stopped almost exactly opposite to you! Oh, Lor’, but you are pale, dear! And you *are* thin! Then her eyes fell on Katherine’s black dress, on which she at once put her head out of the window, kissed her in hearty sympathy, and said: ‘I think I see why. You should get married, dear. It’s far better. A pretty girl like you can always make a nice, comfortable match whenever she likes; and it really would be better for you. I am on my wedding tour now. Did you think when I lost my engaged ring that day, when we were all cooking together, that I’d be a married woman so soon? Mrs. Tallmadge always said I would, but I never believed her. I have sent Edward now to buy me the *World*, and the *Whitehall*, and anything else that seems interesting. I said when I told him to go, “You have taken me out of the world, my love, for a while, but still I must keep up my knowledge of what everyone is doing, or how am I ever to go back to it? We are going

to Scotland now. I am glad to have seen you, just to hear how you are, and what you are doing ?' (Katherine had, as yet, not spoken one word but 'How are you ?') 'I heard you had been in terrible trouble, and had had to take a place as lady-help, or companion, or something. Is that lady on the seat there the one you are with ? She does look sweet ! and such an out-and-out lady ! Now that's just the kind of woman I do like. I'd get you to bring her here to introduce to me, but it's not worth while to disturb her for the short time I'm here. I don't suppose you'd ever want to leave a person like that, for she's so nice, but, Miss Carey, if ever you do want a new situation, if you would just drop me a line, I'd put myself very much about to make it convenient to engage you myself. I always did like you, and I'm not going to stop now, when you want it the most ; besides, it's a duty, and Edward is so kind. They tell me that people are not so kind when one's honeymoon gets over, but I intend Edward to go on as he has begun. Oh, here he is !'

At this moment, a porter pushed a tall, pale, pink-eyed, vacillating young man with a straw hat bound round with an ample puggaree (suggestive of brains which did not seem to exist), and a complexion that looked like long hours spent in a bad atmosphere, towards the carriage, and with something between a bow to Katherine and a dip of the head to ensure a safe entrance into his corner opposite his bride, he got in, and just as *Jemima Jane* was saying, 'Now, Miss Carey, you have seen him, and I hope you will own that this is the sort of husband a girl may be proud of,' the train went off.

With a pitiful little half-formed tear of mortification in her eyes, Katherine crept back to Mrs. Wilbraham's side, and sat down very near her, as if she wished to nestle closer to her for love and sympathy.

'What is it, my poor dear ?' inquired Mrs. Wilbraham, who had seen something of what had taken place, and was so sensitive that she instinctively divined three parts of what Katherine was feeling.

'You are so good to me,' said Katherine. 'I am sometimes afraid that I am not grateful enough ; but oh, how miserable I should be if I were with anyone else !'

What bitterness her life would be if passed under the roof of *Jemima Jane* ! Back came Barbara from the other end of the station, exclaiming eagerly :

'As a lady to a lady, Katherine, I wish to observe to you that I can't help thinking that I have seen *Jemima Jane* ! It can't have been anyone else. She had on a pale pink dress, all puffed, and looped, and gathered, and her hair—it is quite a different colour ! It was golden when we saw her at the kitchen, and it is a reddish-bronze now. It's not half of it her own ; it must have taken her at least an hour to plait it, and some one else years of cultivation to supply the material !'

‘Years of cultivation—

‘And I must work through months of toil,
And years of cultivation!’

‘That’s what you are thinking of, Barbara,’ said Mrs. Wilbraham approvingly. ‘It is a line written by some poet I like. I wish I knew where to find it. I believe it is Tennyson. Katherine, we shall get back again to our own dear books to-day, and you must look that out for me.’

It was not a long journey to Chilworth, and yet it did seem hard, when they reached the last station but one on the way there, that Mrs. Wilbraham should insist on getting out and walking home; for a carriage was waiting for her at the other station, and it was a walk of two miles and a half from this. She often did cut her railway journeys short in this way, but the girls had hoped she would not do it this time, and had been careful not to say anything likely to remind her of this habit. Her reason was, that in her opinion there was something almost impious in assuming that the protecting goodness of Providence which had brought her safely to within one station of home and an easy walking distance, would hold out to the very end, if she were determined not to be content with what had been done for her, but to tax it to the uttermost.

‘Don’t tempt Providence,’ said she, and made up her mind to walk. At Easterly Moor End she got out, and told the guard that a carriage was waiting for her at Little Chilworth, and a cart for her luggage, and that he was to look after all her things for her. The same thing had been said to him so often that he knew exactly what to do. Barbara expressed her vexation at having to walk. Katherine looked her fatigue.

‘How tired and ill she looks!’ exclaimed Barbara.

‘Yes, but how beautiful! I do like to see her when she is like that. She has such an other-world expression!’

‘It’s only because she finds this world so fatiguing!’ replied Barbara, for once speaking rather crossly. It was bad enough to have to go back to Chilworth at all, without having to do it in this uncomfortable way!

If the girls were tired, Mrs. Wilbraham was not. She could endure a great deal more fatigue than that, and was lively and entertaining all the way, but then she was empty-handed, and the girls had to carry her bag and waterproof and umbrella, together with a valuable old china teapot which she had bought in Harrogate, and could not trust out of her sight, and a parcel of plants of spider-wort which some one had given her, and she was taking back in triumph to her dear garden.

‘Are you not glad that we have got that beautiful plant?’ she asked, and Katherine, who found it very heavy, thought it an essential part of her duty to be sympathetic and say,

‘Yes.’

'It is very nice to get home again!' Mrs. Wilbraham exclaimed joyously. 'I feel so happy! Just as if something very delightful were going to happen!'

The girls looked at each other; their feeling was eminently the reverse of this, but they were tired, and therefore disposed to take a dark view. Mrs. Wilbraham was enchanted with everything—even the smoke of the collieries pleased her for once, because it lay in long wreaths across the sky and took the colours of evening in a strange way that no real cloud would have done.

Oh, my dear girls, what lovely complexions you have got!' was her greeting to some of the servants who were standing waiting for her by the hall-door. 'Have you at last taken my advice? Have you adopted the diet I have so often recommended to you? You have, you say. Well, all I can say is, that every time you stand before your looking-glasses, you must see for yourselves how good my advice was, and be glad you followed it.'

'I have been telling my servants for years that they would be twice as healthy if they would but give up coffee and tea, and eat porridge and drink milk, and now Rhoda says that they are doing it, and that I shall have a big milk and oatmeal bill, but I don't mind that.'

This was said to Katherine, while the others were out of the way. When Katherine went to bed that night, Rhoda was just going into her room with a large jug.

'Miss Carey,' said she, 'I've made it milk to-night.'

'You have made what milk, Rhoda?'

'The water,' replied Rhoda, laughing, 'and I've put your oatmeal there on the washstand in a large white jar, same as we have ours. We none of us liked you at first, Miss Carey, and wasn't inclined to put up with you, but we do like you now, for we have found you pertikler quiet and civil, and you never tell tales of us, and you keep Mrs. Wilbraham from worritting us. Before you came, we had no peace with being called away to admire the clouds and the pretty green trees, and the atmospheres of different sorts, and such-like, and then our work wasn't done, and it was no use for us to say it was because she had taken up so much of our time, for then she said that the time spent in watching nature's wonders was well spent, and that our work ought to be twice as well done for having seen a fine sight, instead of not being done at all.'

'I know,' said Katherine, 'she forgets that you can't be in two places at once; but still I don't understand about that milk, or the oatmeal either. I can't drink a jugful of milk; in fact, I don't think I want any, thank you.'

'Drink! It's not to drink; it's for your complexion.'

'Oh, to make porridge with; now I see why you brought me the oatmeal. But I can't make it, Rhoda.'

'It's not to drink nor make porridge of, neither. It's for you to

wash yourself in. We all wash in milk, and if you steep a good big handful of that oatmeal in it for an hour or two, it makes it nicer still to use. Feel how soft my hands are! You don't mind feeling them, do you? It's just wonderful what a change it has made in them, and we have all found the improvement as great.'

So that was how the fine complexions Mrs. Wilbraham had admired so much were obtained. Katherine declined the cosmetic on high moral grounds, but she couldn't make Rhoda promise to use it no more, and while she was still trying to do so, they heard the sound of wheels.

'Here's Mr. Wentworth, I'll be bound for it!' said Rhoda; 'I must go—oh no, it's Lydia's place now to let him in.'

'Why do you think it is Mr. Wentworth?'

'I know it is. Didn't Mrs. Wilbraham write and tell me to get his room ready against you all came, and hard work I had to read her letter, it was that badly written! I don't like Mr. Wentworth.'

'Good-night, Rhoda,' said Katherine, who did not consider that any part of her penance need consist in talking to Miss Rhoda on terms of intimacy and equality.

'Briggs—he's the coachman, Miss Carey—says Mr. Wentworth is a "horrid young swallowing chap," and that's just what he is! He swallows till he has neither sense nor judgment. He had too much every night he was here last time—good-night, Miss Carey; you might just as well have had the good of this milk.'

'Poor Barbara!' thought Katherine, but she did not go and tell her the bad news, for the chances were that she was now asleep.

The 'horrid young swallowing chap' was warmly welcomed by his mother.

'Well,' said he, on entering, 'I am here.'

'I see it! I know it! I expected you! My darling, I am so glad to have you!'

'Yes, I know; but of course you understand what has brought me so quickly. I don't think you would have seen me for some time if it hadn't been for what you said about Barbara having got a new lover.'

Mrs. Wilbraham threw herself back in her chair and laughed a pretty musical laugh, and almost clapped her soft hands together in her extreme joy at the success of her little stratagem. Some people have the keenest possible pleasure in manipulating events, and she was one of these.

'Don't be foolish, mother,' said Wentworth angrily. 'You can't suppose that I find this a laughing matter.'

'No, dear; and I don't wish you to do so. Ask her to marry you to-morrow, that's what I advise you to do, and something tells me that she will accept you.'

'Something tells me quite the contrary. However, if she does not, I shall without scruple make it the object of my life to break the neck of the young gentleman whom you seem to think she prefers.'

As no such person existed, Mrs. Wilbraham was unmoved by this threat ; besides, she looked on all threats as idle bluster.

‘Who is he? Why don’t you tell me? I wish I had not come, if that is how you are going to treat me. Is it Coventry, after all? You said not in your last letter.’

‘No, it’s not Coventry.’

‘Will you swear that, mother?’

Something in Wentworth’s manner made Mrs. Wilbraham very glad to reply :

‘Yes, Wentworth, I will swear it. I do swear it. On my honour it is not Coventry. I hope you believe me, dear?’ and she did not feel happy until he said yes, for she well knew his passionate irrational nature, though when less important things were concerned she admired it.

‘Yes, I believe,’ he answered, ‘and it’s well for Coventry that I do. Well, if Barbara won’t have me, she shall certainly never have him. Who is this new man, mother?’

‘Oh, don’t worry about him, my darling ; he is not to be named in the same breath as you. Wentworth, you are handsomer than ever.’

Poor lady ! her bodily eyes were dimmed by disease, and her mental eyes blinded by unreasoning love.

‘Mother, how I wish you would be sensible for once ! What do I care whether I am handsome or not? I want to know this man’s name. I tell you plainly that I would not have come home if I had had the least idea you would make such a difficulty about telling it to me. What’s the use of such half-confidence? Of course I must know. How can I act?’

‘You need not act in any way but one. I don’t intend to answer any questions. Just you attend to your own affairs, my dear boy, and see if you can arrange things with Barbara.’

‘Indeed I won’t!’ said he roughly. ‘I think it would be much better for me to go away again. I’ll think it over, and if I make up my mind to do so—as most likely I shall—you won’t see me again, for I shall go early, before you are awake.’

On this Mrs. Wilbraham could not conceal her alarm, and said most anxiously :

‘Not really, Wentworth? You wouldn’t really do such a cruel thing? You would break my heart! Think, Wentworth, it is a whole year since I have seen you ; and you know how I love you!’

‘You say you do ; but nobody would think it ; you refuse to answer the commonest question. You will have to answer, though, for I won’t stand being kept in ignorance of things I ought to know. You wrote and advised me to come because Barbara had another lover. If you did not quite say it, you certainly hinted at it’—for here Wentworth saw that his mother was about to utter a protest—‘of course that brought me here, and when I am here you won’t tell me who he is. Good-night, mother, and probably good-bye, too.’

'Wentworth, don't be so cruel!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham, in the utmost distress. 'I could not bear to lose you in such a way as this. You couldn't do such a thing!'

'Oh yes, I could, and I will if you don't tell me his name,' replied Wentworth, who knew his power.

'His name——' she began, and then she hesitated, for it was so hard to have to deprive this most useful creation of her own brain of every little shred of existence. 'He hasn't a name. I'll tell you the truth, my darling: I invented the whole thing to make you come. It was just an innocent device to make you jealous, you dear silly boy, and it succeeded admirably, and brought you even sooner than I expected. There, I have told you all.'

'You say that you have told me all,' said he roughly. 'Then I tell you honestly that I don't believe you! You are afraid to tell me the truth, and so you don't.'

'My dear Wentworth, don't be foolish.' Nothing would have made Mrs. Wilbraham angry with him. 'I have told you the truth—on my honour I have. I got tired of your being such a laggard in love, and I invented that little plan of bringing you home all out of my own poor head. Don't be vexed—it was necessary; month after month passed, and you, my darling, seemed to be going to stay away for ever.'

'I only wish I had stayed away now,' said Wentworth petulantly. 'I don't see the good of coming here to be made a fool of by anybody, least of all by my own mother; but you can't do it! Talk as much as you choose, you won't make me believe that Barbara has not got some lover of whom you are afraid.'

'Indeed, she has not, Wentworth,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'On my oath she has not.'

'You might say so till you were weary, mother, but you would never get me to believe you! When you wrote that letter to me you wrote the truth; now that you see I am not disposed to take your news quietly, you are denying it just to pacify me and put me off the scent. I suppose I must pretend to believe you; but I shall speak to Barbara about it, and if I stay here, I shall keep my eyes open. You won't be able to hide this man, I assure you. I shall soon discover him! Have you had many visitors lately?'

'No, dear, hardly anyone. No one is less molested in that way than I; besides, we couldn't have people here, we have been keeping so few servants.'

'Have you seen much of any of our relations?'

'I? My dear Wentworth, how can you ask such a thing? Have you forgotten everything about your mother and your home? Don't you know that the aim of my life has been to avoid all heavy-minded relations, and all relations are heavy-minded? No; I've seen none but Coventry, and not much of him.'

'I am going to bed, mother,' said Wentworth abruptly.

‘But not away from me to-morrow?’

‘I don’t know,’ said he roughly. Then he added pleadingly, ‘You might tell me his name before I go, mother. I’ll be all right with you if you do.’

Again Mrs. Wilbraham protested that ‘he’ was the creature of her own invention; again Wentworth refused credence; he refused to sit down and talk of other things, and went surlily away.

‘He has gone away without kissing me because I won’t tell him a secret which does not exist,’ wailed Mrs. Wilbraham; and the only thing which gave her any comfort was the thought that his want of belief in her, disagreeable as it made him for the time, would help to ensure his happiness. His jealousy would certainly make him more in love with Barbara, and more determined to gain her.

Wentworth Wilbraham really was very much attached to his cousin, but in a very poor and selfish way. His love for her was, however, the only stable thing in his unsettled life. After all, it amounted to little. Occasionally in the midst of a whirl of excitement, it gave him a certain pleasure to spend a quiet half-hour in remembering that far away in the North, in the tranquil home where he had been so happy when a boy, Barbara was living now.

It was a rest even to think of her. He wanted to keep her always there in peaceful seclusion, and then some day, when he was older, and thoroughly tired of knocking about in the weary world of pleasure, he would come back to her, and be loved and pitied for all the bad health he had brought on himself, and nursed until he was well again, and never by any chance reproached.

If Barbara were taken from him, it seemed to him that he had nothing left to look forward to. All his future life would be just as unsettled as his present—he felt it would be unendurable; and the mere thought of some other man enjoying her gentle companionship, while he himself had no one but his poor tiresome old mother to live with, drove him almost beside himself.

And yet he was so far from being violently in love with Barbara, that if his mother had not applied the spur of jealousy, he might not have returned to Chilworth for months! Why should he? he had often asked himself. There was no hurry. If a man did not enjoy himself when young, he could certainly not do it afterwards; and Barbara would love him all the more if he showed some indifference. Now he was resolved not to rest until she accepted him. Then he would probably go away again for eighteen months or so; but then he would have her letters to show him that he had her safe, and the knowledge that he could go home and marry her whenever he choose.

He was late in going downstairs next morning, and no wonder, considering the state in which he had gone to bed.

Barbara was late too. She was one of those women who always have arrears of sleep to make up, and could at any time lie down

and sleep two hours, and still not have rest enough to compensate for the wear and tear of her daily life.

At last she came. She knew that Wentworth had arrived, and had not unnaturally traced some connection between Mrs. Wilbraham's letters and his appearance.

'We will wait a little longer for Wentworth,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, who was in great spirits because he had not fulfilled his threat and departed. 'Oh, Barbara, he is looking so handsome, and so are you, my dear.'

Barbara, with her fair, bright complexion and lovely hair curling about her head, looked like a beautiful boy-angel, and her dress of light-blue cambric was sky-like enough to carry out the idea. It was quite right to call her handsome, though pretty would have been a better word.

But when Wentworth came lounging in, looking tall, limp, listless, and ill provided with bones in his body, the girls, as they looked in his sallow, haggard face, on which a life of perpetual dissipation had set its own ugly mark, were so little prepared for the change for the worse which had taken place in him, that they almost expressed their astonishment audibly.

He seemed delighted to see Barbara; then he turned his cold watery eyes on Katherine, and muttered some reluctant words of civility, after which he dropped into a chair, and looked at the breakfast-table with the air of one who had no intention of eating. Barbara gave him some coffee; Katherine offered him cold fowl or eggs; but innocent country fare was not what was needed by his jaded appetite, and he promptly told them he could never get on at all without a really hot 'devil.'

'The "devil" shall be brought!' said Mrs. Wilbraham with much dignity, and presently the devil was brought, together with the letter-bag, and just as Mrs. Wilbraham was finding fault with the bread, and declaring that she did not believe that there would ever be any really good bread again until we returned to the good old customs of King Pharaoh's days, and hanged a chief baker whenever there was any cause of complaint, Barbara, who was opening the letter-bag, exclaimed:

'Why, Wentworth, how odd! Here is a letter from you to Katherine! There really is—how odd!'

Katherine understood what it was in a moment. She blushed so deeply that even Mrs. Wilbraham saw it; then she turned almost as white as the sheeny table-cloth over which she was bending, to hide, if possible, her troubled face; and while Mrs. Wilbraham was asking why Wentworth should write to Katherine, and Wentworth himself was holding out his hand to Barbara, and saying, 'Let me have a look at the letter which you say is written by me; I have written no letter,' and while Barbara was still looking at her in loving surprise, Katherine took the letter, and, after one glance at it, put it quietly in her pocket, saying only:

‘It is not from Mr. Wentworth—it is from an old friend of mine, who writes very like him. I don’t wonder at your making a mistake.’

How she sat through that breakfast she never knew. She did not hear a word that was said. She was strangely conscious of the presence of the letter which lay in her pocket ; she felt an almost insurmountable desire to go away and read it. She had not had a line from him for more than a year, and during all that time she had not so much as heard his name.

He was living with the Davenports—that she knew, but only by implication, for she had forbidden Nancy and Frank to mention him in their letters to her. If she had been asked how she felt towards him before that letter came, she would have answered, ‘I think I have done a great deal towards conquering my love for him.’ She could not have said that now !

CHAPTER XXXVII.

‘The sun was gleaming in the mid of day,
Dead still the air.’

CHATTERTON.

‘Qui est-ce donc qu’on trompe ici?’

MOLLIÈRE.

As soon as Katherine thought she might safely assume that breakfast was over, she tried to escape to her own room, but was stopped by Mrs. Wilbraham’s saying :

‘My dear, I want you. Come back soon, for I should like to go through the catalogues.’

‘Can’t I do it?’ inquired Barbara, for she saw that Katherine longed to get away.

‘No, Barby, you must come and talk to me,’ said Wentworth, very affectionately.

‘I must have Katherine,’ repeated Mrs. Wilbraham, still more emphatically. ‘Come in about half an hour, dear. I’ll have all ready for you to begin.’

Going through the catalogues meant an hour or two spent in reading aloud to Mrs. Wilbraham, page after page of lists of most enticing second-hand books. She had a good knowledge of books, and great love for them, and always was enticed to the extent of having numbers marked for purchase ; but if ever Katherine said, ‘Now let me write and order those we have marked,’ Mrs. Wilbraham invariably replied, ‘Oh no ! wait a little ; we have not got to that yet !’ and they never did get to that. Marking the books, or rather having their beloved names recalled to her, was the old lady’s real joy. Katherine did not begrudge it to her ; she was perfectly ready to take any trouble to please her, but at this particular moment she was wild with eagerness to see what was in that

letter. She hurried to her room. Half-way upstairs, the thought struck her that, in pursuance of her vow, she ought to burn it unread.

'Impossible !' she exclaimed ; 'it is impossible to destroy it and never know what he has written ! I can give up everything but that.'

She would not let herself kiss it—she would not let herself feel pity for it when she tore it impatiently open. She read with dazzled eyes :

'The Wild Hawk Inn, Little Chilworth.

'MY DEAR KATHERINE,

'Mrs. Wilbraham has very kindly invited me to pay her a visit at Chilworth. I am so far on my way to call on her ; but before I present myself at her house, I wish to know if it would be disagreeable to you to see me there. I will not come if you say "Yes ;" but, Katherine, do not be so cruel and unloving as to do so. Let me see you—let me speak to you, and be near you once again. You can never teach me not to love you. I almost venture to hope that you can never teach yourself not to love me, for yours is a steadfast nature. If we love each other apart, would it be so wrong to love each other together ? Need the suffering you inflict on yourself last for ever ? I will say no more now ; I won't even speak of this when I see you, unless you give me permission. You will see me, dear ? I deserve so much as that of you, for I have abstained from even one written or spoken word for thirteen cruelly long months.'

'It's true—it's all most true !' exclaimed Katherine ; 'but I will not see him ! I dare not.' And lest her courage should fail her, she wrote instantly :

'Don't come ! Make some excuse to Mrs. Wilbraham, and go away without seeing her. You are very good and kind to me ; forgive this apparent unkindness, and do not ask to see me again. I must not think of being happy for many years to come, if ever. Excuse the great haste in which I write. Good-bye. Forgive—oh, do forgive me !'

'What a letter to send him !' thought she ; 'I have written so coldly, and yet I love him more than everything and everybody in the world ! What would I not give to see him ! What a miserable girl I am ! I have been wretched ever since I had to part from him, and must be wretched to the end. How is my letter to be sent ? He ought to have it at once, and I can't go where he is. Besides, I have to do the catalogues. O God, what a life !'

She longed to get the letter sent out of the house ; if it were left in her possession much longer, she knew she would never have the heart to send it.

While this poor agonized girl was still seeking some means to

send her letter and thus get rid of a temptation which was beginning to be too strong for her powers of resistance, Rhoda came to tell her that Mrs. Wilbraham had been waiting for her for some time, and was getting very impatient.

'Where is Miss Barbara?' asked Katherine in great distress, for Mrs. Wilbraham was always very angry if anyone kept her waiting.

'She is in the garden, Miss Carey: look, you can see her from the window.'

Quick as thought, Katherine ran to the garden, for she did not dare to send Rhoda on an errand of this kind, and no one but Barbara could help her. Barbara knew about Lewis Barrington—Barbara would understand what was wanted in a moment, and would either take the letter herself, or have sufficient authority to send some one with it.

'Now we have the result of my aunt's second fit of thinking!' was Barbara's exclamation when she had heard Katherine's story. 'She has brought Wentworth, and she has brought Mr. Barrington. She meant well, no doubt; so that all you can do is to say, as Byron did apropos of Madame de Staël, "*Je pardonne à ses terribles bonnes intentions.*" Give me the letter, and I'll send it at once. Dear Katherine you have been crying—I am so sorry.'

'I do wonder what you two girls are talking about!' said Wentworth, suddenly coming from behind some laurels which had concealed his approach. He was just too late, however, to see the letter given. Both girls blushed.

'My mother has been asking for you two or three times, Miss Carey. She is very impatient, I think,' said he, for he had a great desire to get rid of Katherine.

With one appealing glance at Barbara, who answered it by nodding in an inspiring manner, she hurried away.

'And now, Barby, tell me what you two were plotting about,' said he. 'You were plotting something; I could see that.'

'Nonsense!' replied Barbara; and then she also made a step or two in the direction of the house. She was in a hurry to send the letter off, and besides that, wanted to escape from Wentworth.

'You are not to go away,' said he. 'It's an awfully hot day, but it's cool here——'

'Oh, the house is quite cool enough,' said she.

'And so are you, Barby. Come, do be pleasant for once. I should have thought you might have got out of the habit of being disagreeable to me.'

'Perhaps I have. There's a seat; go and sit quite still in one corner of it, and see if I come near you to say one thing that is unpleasant.'

'Clever! But I have no time, Barbara; really and truly, I have no time for nonsense. I have come home to talk to you most seriously, and——'

'I have no time to talk now,' interrupted Barbara. 'I have something to do which must be done at once!'

'What is it? Tell me.'

'I can't tell you. It's not a thing of any importance, though—I mean, not a thing that you would think it very important to know about. You needn't look so curious, Wentworth. I assure you you would not care to know about it.'

'That's what people always say when they are concealing something from you that you would very much like to know, and that I suppose is what you are doing, Miss Barby. However, keep your secret, and listen to mine; only mine is none to you. Barbara, you know I love you—come and sit down and let me have time to tell you at least some part of what is in my mind. You are not wanted in the house. My mother has got Miss Carey; we can have the morning to ourselves.'

On this Barbara's distress, both on her own account and on Katherine's, became quite painful. How was she to keep her promise about the letter? and if she did not keep it, Mr. Barrington might come.

'Wentworth,' she said, 'do believe me when I tell you I can't stay. I really can't, for I have promised to do something at once, and I dare not break my word. It is something important.'

'Aha!' cried he, in angry triumph, 'and it is not two minutes since you assured me in the most truthful manner in the world that this thing you had to do was not important at all. Of course you didn't deceive me. I was quite aware you were only telling a story!'

'Wentworth, let me go. It was no story! What I have to do is a thing that is of no importance to you, but is of great importance to the person who wants it done; and to me, too, because I promised to do it. So I must go at once.'

'You are only making excuses to get away from me. You want to get away, Barby, and I want to keep you; and what's more, I will keep you!' and he seized her wrist and made her go and sit on a seat under a tree; then he sat down also, still holding her firmly by the wrist.

'Wentworth,' said she, with tears of vexation and pain in her eyes, 'you are hurting me! You are indeed!'

'I can't help it; if I am, don't complain, for it's your own fault,' said the spoilt boy, without relaxing the tightness of his grasp by one hair's breadth.

She saw that she must hide her indignation, and treat him as she would treat a petulant, ill-conditioned child.

'Wentworth, I suppose you don't want to hurt me. Don't hold my wrist so tightly.'

'Then will you promise to sit quietly where you are?'

'Yes, if I must; only first let me go and ask the gardener's boy to do something for me.'

One of the gardener's boys was weeding a flower-bed at some little distance, and Barbara resolved to send him off at once to the Wild Hawk at Little Chilworth, with the letter. If that were but done, she might as well resign herself to hear what her cousin had to say, for she would be obliged to hear it some time.

He bound her by a solemn promise to return, and then watched her talking to the boy. He was almost certain that she gave him a letter. Almost immediately afterwards she returned, as in honour bound, to Wentworth, and the weeding-boy left his work and walked away. She had said to him :

'You are to take this letter to the Wild Hawk, this very moment, without going home, or stopping to say one word to anyone.'

She was pleased to see that he obeyed her.

'You gave that boy a letter to take to some one,' said Wentworth suspiciously.

'I gave him a shilling, you mean.'

'You gave him a shilling to take your letter.'

'If I did,' said Barbara, 'why need you object? It is surely no business of yours.'

'Oh, Barby! First you tried to throw dust in my eyes, and now you snatch up pepper. Somehow or other, whatever you do, I love you. I do love you!—You will marry me, won't you?'

'No, Wentworth, I never will; don't be vexed with me. I never will!' said Barbara resolutely.

'That's nonsense! It must be nonsense!'

'Indeed it is not.'

'Why won't you?'

'I don't love you enough.'

'Be quick and love me more, then.'

'That I never shall.'

'Then whom do you love enough?'

She coloured in a guilty fashion, but said firmly :

'No one, Wentworth.'

'You do! If you can't love me, it's because you love some one else. Is it Coventry?'

'It's not Coventry—I never see him.'

'It's somebody else, then. Come, you need not look contemptuous and turn your face away. I like your face, and I like you, but I don't like the stories you tell. They are quite useless too, for your manner betrays you; and besides, I was warned. You perhaps don't know it, but a kind friend warned me that you had a lover.'

'Whatever my manner may be, Wentworth, I can't help thinking yours is very far from what it ought to be.'

'Possibly! I can believe it, but then you provoke me, Barbara. You see, I want you to be my wife.'

She shook her head.

'You won't? You stick to it?'

'I won't! I am sorry if I seem unkind to you, but I never will.'

'Barbara, you might treat me better. Is it because you think me a bad fellow?'

'Partly, no doubt; but besides that, I don't love you enough.'

'But I am not going to be a bad fellow all my life. When I come home for good, I mean to live as quietly as you or anyone could desire. I don't say that I have lived a pattern life; but, Barby, if you will marry me you shall have no reason to complain. You must love me; I tell you plainly that I can't love anyone but you, and I intend to have you!'

'You never will! Give it up, Wentworth, I entreat you.'

'I shall persuade you in time. There is only one thing I am anxious about—that other man I was warned against. Was that letter to him?'

'You were warned against? What man were you warned against? What do you mean?'

'I was warned about some man who is fond of you, and whom you are encouraging. Mind, I won't have it, Barby! Have you been writing to him?'

'Wentworth, you need not trouble yourself about this imaginary man, or any man—I shall never give a different answer from that I am giving you now—I am very sorry, but I can never love you. I will tell you one thing, however, and that is, that I have not written a letter to anyone for three weeks, and the last I wrote was to Mrs. Davenport.'

'Fibs! my dear Barby; in the name of the Prophet, fibs! When you go in, as my dearly beloved mother would say, take down that row of books in green bindings on the third shelf, and find that quotation for me.'

Barbara rose indignantly. He, for he was still holding her by the wrist, drew her back into her place by his side, saying:

'I seem to be jesting, but I am neither jesting nor inclined to take your ill-treatment lightly. Listen to what I am going to say now, and don't try to get away, for you can't go until I choose to allow it. I ask you if you are in love with anyone. You say no, and blush hard all the time you are denying! I catch you sending off letters in a great hurry, that you can't put into the bag and send in the proper way. When questioned, you tell fibs and employ stratagems. I was warned that things were not going on rightly. I see that the warning was not given without a reason. All this makes it necessary that I, in my turn, should give a warning to you, and I do give you one, and a very solemn one. It will be better for you to understand how solemn it is. I warn you, Barbara, that you will not deceive me long. I have a pair of good sharp eyes of my own, and I intend to use them. I tell you again you shall not deceive me long.'

'I have nothing to hide,' exclaimed Barbara angrily. 'If I had, I don't see what business it could be of yours to pry into it! Supposing I had a secret, you would have no right to know it.'

'I have a right, because I intend to be your husband, Barby dear. You surely do not expect me to believe that you mean to be so unkind to me for ever?' and he slipped his hand down her wrist until her struggling little hand lay in his.

It did not lie there a moment. She dragged it from him, exclaiming:

'Wentworth, you take an ungenerous advantage of my poverty. You think that I can't leave Chilworth because I have no money; but if you make life so unbearable to me, I can at any rate do what Katherine Carey does.'

'Oh no, you can't! You know that you are a good little soul, and that however ill we all treated you, you would still remember that for better or for worse you are one of our family, and wouldn't like to leave us. I'm sure you never could bear to leave my poor half-blind mother to the mercy of paid strangers—you know you couldn't.'

Barbara sighed; she herself knew that she could not. He was right; however unhappy they made her at Chilworth, she could never desert her aunt.

'I hate your Katherine Carey,' said he; 'stupid, melancholy creature!'

'I shall go,' said Barbara angrily: she thought it profane to speak against Katherine.

'You may go, but don't you imagine that I am going to pack up my things and go away and leave you to your own devices, as I did a twelvemonth since. I intend to stay here, Miss Barbara, and watch you!' and as Wentworth said this, his pale face turned still paler with passion.

'Do what you choose! I never do anything that I wish to conceal,' said Barbara; and no girl ever made this affirmation with more perfect truth. He did not believe her.

'Well, I've given you fair warning; and if I find you doing anything I don't approve of and any harm comes of it, please to remember that,' said he.

He left her, and then went and strolled about the grounds to walk off some of his indignation. He was looking over the fence of one of the Hall fields soon afterwards, when he saw the boy to whom Barbara had entrusted her letter running down the lane on the other side of the hedge.

'Hallo!' he cried; 'I want to speak to you, boy. Come here.'

'Munnot stop!' replied the boy, and ran still faster, insomuch that he was speedily out of sight.

Baffled again, and with temper considerably ruffled by this surcharge of disaster, Wentworth hurried to the gardener's cottage;

recovering himself on the way, however, sufficiently to remember that he had better turn this incident to account.

'Mrs. Adams,' said he, 'I have just seen that boys of yours going down the road. Now I am quite sure that Miss Linley told him to go his errand at once—she never meant him to lose so much time.'

'No, sir, she did not; and Matthew, poor lad, wasn't for losing no time neither. She said he was to start at once, and not run home first; and he did start at once, poor lad, for she told him to do it. But you see, sir, his father met him in the road, just outside the door, and his father's that partikler about the lad's looking tidy, that he thought shame to see him going off to walk a mile and a half to a place like the Wild Hawk, where so many folks is passing, and him not cleaned from his work; so he just sent him home to me, and I cleaned him up as quick as I could, and told him to run all the way to make up for lost time.'

'Yes, but you kept him far too long. My cousin gave him directions what to do when he got there—you must have kept him till he had forgotten everything.'

'Oh, but I was very particular to tell him exactly what he had to do. Just before I set him off, I said to him, "Matthew, honey," said I, "take the letter to the Wild Hawk Inn, at Little Chilworth"—not but what the boy knows the place quite well—not so well as his father, perhaps, for he's there a deal, more's the pity—but as well as me. "Take it up to the Wild Hawk," says I, "ask for a gentleman called Mr. Lewis Barrington, who is stopping there, and put it into his own hand." Now is he likely to forget that? Isn't that plain?'

It was indeed plain, and Wentworth was delighted. He had managed very cleverly, and contrived to extract all the information he wanted. He had never heard the name of Barrington before, not even as that of an author of some fame; but he felt now as if he was standing on firm ground. While he was talking to Mrs. Adams the Hall luncheon-bell rang. He hurried back to do a little more towards unravelling this mystery. After luncheon he thought it was not unlikely that he might take a little walk himself in the direction of the Wild Hawk. He reviewed the situation as he walked back, and decided that it would be prudent to treat Barbara as if nothing had occurred between them—that is, if she would allow him to do so. He forgot that she, poor girl, would be only too thankful to have the evil day of her aunt's wrath deferred. As soon as a moment for undisturbed observation came, he said:

'Barbara, that boy did not go when you sent him; he has only just gone; I saw him setting out a few minutes since.' This said, he rapidly glanced at the faces of all present. Barbara looked surprised and displeased; Mrs. Wilbraham was evidently thinking of something else—her face told nothing; Katherine seemed to turn pale, but he was not sure, for he had not noticed her much before.

'You are sure he did not go when I sent him?' asked Barbara boldly.

She was determined to treat this as a matter of no importance.

'Quite! I did not see him to speak to, for he was in the road and I on the other side of the hedge; but I am sure he did not go.'

'Well, I dare say it won't signify,' said she, and changed the conversation.

'What is everyone going to do this afternoon?' asked Wentworth, after luncheon.

Everyone looked at Mrs. Wilbraham, whose movements regulated those of all. For once she disclaimed all desire to have anybody to assist her in passing her time. She wanted no one. She was tired, she said, and would sit alone in some sheltered corner of the garden. She would not be read to or talked to; she had been busy all the day, and felt as if she could enjoy a rest. Those catalogues had used up the whole morning; and all the time she had been doing them, she had smelt the delicious smell of roses outside, without having leisure to abandon herself entirely to its delight. This afternoon she would bask in the sunshine, and steep herself in this perfume, and listen to the thousand and one little sounds of musical rapture which are to be heard on a warm dry August afternoon in the country.

'What are you girls going to do?' asked Wentworth suspiciously.

'Stay somewhere near, so that if aunt finds she wants us, after all, we may be at hand,' replied Barbara.

'I want no one! use the time as you like,' said Mrs. Wilbraham.

'I'll lay my life on it that they have a thorough good understanding amongst each other, and that this is all acting, undertaken on purpose to hookwink me; but I defy them!' thought Wentworth.

'You are certain you do not want us?' said Katherine.

'I am quite certain I do not: I wish you all to do just as you like this afternoon. Try to forget that I exist. Barbara, you and Katherine had better go into the dene—the dene is always deliciously cold.'

'Is she sending them out of her way, while she receives a visit from this Barrington; or is she sending them into the dene to meet him? I shall have no easy task this afternoon, if I have to watch three women at once,' thought Wentworth.

'We'll think about it,' replied Barbara; and then she went with Katherine to her room.

Barbara threw herself into the window-seat—she, too, was puzzled by Mrs. Wilbraham's unusual wish to be alone.

'I think she must know that he is here, and is anxious to speak to him before we see him,' she said.

'But do you think that he has written to her?'

'He must have done so—or perhaps she has heard of his being here. Anyone can see that she wants to get us out of the way, and she can have no other reason.'

'Then let us be got out of the way ! That is just what I want. Help me to avoid seeing him. Even if your aunt has not invited him here this afternoon, there is always the chance of his coming, especially as that tiresome boy was so long in taking my letter.'

'Then let us go into the dene ; we are safe there, for every door is locked. Don't look so perplexed and miserable, dear Katherine ; all your troubles will be smoothed away in time. Come and look at aunt settling herself on the lawn. Poor thing ! how hard it is that she who gets so much pleasure out of every little change of light and colour should lose her sight ! She will be so warm—and there is that odious Wentworth going out to her with a cigar in his mouth, and the dear old lady expressly said that she was going to sit out of doors to smell her sweet roses !'

It was true ; Wentworth, after some consideration, had decided that she was the one of the party who required the most watching. He could not help seeing that she was extremely anxious to get everyone out of the way, and this made him resolve not to go.

Both he and the girls were alike mistaken in believing that there was any reason for Mrs. Wilbraham's strong desire for solitude beyond that given by Mrs. Wilbraham herself. She did wish to be alone, hoping thus to enjoy fuller and completer delight. Her innocence of any scheme misled all who were on the look-out for schemes, more completely than the most refined cunning could have done. She was sitting under a sheltering tree ; one of the servants had brought out a comfortable chair, another followed with a Persian rug for her feet ; her favourite cat at once recognised that this had been designed for her own special benefit, and had wooed two fat little kittens to walk so far by a succession of alluring sounds, and having reached the rug with them in triumph, had settled herself down in a deliciously tender curve, and resigned herself to a happy afternoon spent in the performance of her motherly duties. Even before her dear cat came, Mrs. Wilbraham was overflowing with happiness at the sight of so much beauty. Puss put the finishing touch to her ecstasy.

'You lovely creature !' she exclaimed ; 'you exquisitely lovely creature ! I can quite understand whole nations being given up to the worship of your race. It might be better for us if we did it here, but I suppose it would be thought odd. However, I worship you, you beauty ! I adore your savage grace ! I like to see your fierce claws tucked up into those delicate soft balls of paws that look so innocent and helpless. I——'

'Hollo, a cat !' exclaimed Wentworth, suddenly appearing. 'I'll soon dislodge you, you brute ! Those animals always seem to think that the universe was created for them ! I'll soon dislodge you, madam !'

'Don't touch her, Wentworth !' exclaimed Mrs. Wilbraham ; 'I'll never forgive you if you disturb her !'

‘Oh no, I’ll not touch her,’ said he.

His mother could not quite see what he was doing, but he took his cigar out of his mouth and put it to pussy’s nose. She flew off in extreme disgust and fear, and the kittens, rudely torn from their beloved occupation, rolled heavily over and over on the rug.

‘Oh, take your little beasts with you,’ said he, and gathered up the two kittens in one hand, and put them roughly on the grass.

Little by little, Mrs. Wilbraham seemed to arrive at an understanding of what had happened, and said slowly and painfully :

‘Wentworth, I never expected to live to see a child of mine do such a thing ! You have hurt me inexpressibly ! That cat must be replaced on the rug.’

‘No, mother, she must not ; I want to lie there myself—I want to be with you.’

Mrs. Wilbraham hesitated. She loved her cat very much, but she was passionately attached to her son ; so she put away her anger, and taking the offended cat and kittens on her lap, left the rug to her son. Soon, however, she remembered another grievance, and said :

‘My dear boy, you know I don’t like smoking.’

‘I’ll throw my cigar away.’

Mrs. Wilbraham sighed. She had wished to have a feast of sight and scent, and he had taken off the edge of her enjoyment.

‘You want me gone,’ he muttered pettishly.

‘Darling, no ; I always love you, except when you behave ill to my dear friend pussy. I never want you gone. This afternoon, though, I must confess I had a fancy for solitude.’

‘I’ll go in a minute then,’ said he, now firmly resolved to stay.

‘It’s only that I am so very seldom alone, and it is so unusually beautiful, and the air so delicious.’

‘Well, I call it a blazing brute of a day ! It’s enough to kill you ; and there’s not shade enough here—why do you sit here ?’

‘I like it. I think it is too hot for you here—far too hot. There are the two girls going into the dene ; can’t you go and walk with them and be cool ?’

‘No, I’ll stay with you,’ said he.

He thought he had never seen such barefaced attempts to get rid of him.

‘Dear, you would be happier with the young folks,’ said she, caressing his lanky locks.

‘I couldn’t be so unkind as to leave my own dear mother alone.’

‘“My mind to me a kingdom is,”’ said she.

‘Yes, but you are not queen of it,’ thought he. He was quite capable of saying it, but he was too anxious to keep her in a good humour to say it now. Every moment he expected to hear the sound of the lodge-bell, which would announce a visitor.

Two hours passed, and still she sat under the glistening steely

evergreens, and still he lay on the rug at her feet, waiting for what was to come. Suddenly he heard the click of the little gate which led into the dene, and immediately afterward saw Katherine coming into the garden. She looked as if something had happened, and seemed anxious to get into the house without being stopped.

Where was Barbara? Had he made a fool of himself by keeping such strict watch over his mother, who did not seem to have had any particular mischief on hand after all, and leaving those two girls free to do whatever they liked? Without a word of explanation to Mrs. Wilbraham, he ran after Katherine, who was continuing her walk along the side of the garden straight from the wicket-gate to the Hall.

'Where have you left Barbara, Miss Carey?' he asked, very unceremoniously.

Katherine looked much disturbed by the question, but said:

'In the dene, Mr. Wilbraham; I left her in the dene.'

'Why did you leave her? Why did you not both come home together?'

'I wanted to come home before she did. I dare say she is coming now.'

'Was anyone with her?'

Katherine hesitated—hesitated very much; but after all she knew nothing of his suspicions and jealousies, or of any reason why he should not know the truth, so she replied:

'She was talking to a gentleman when I came away. Now, Mr. Wilbraham, let me go in. I am tired, and I don't want to answer any more questions.'

He did not want to ask any. He wanted, of all things, to put a speedy end to Barbara's interview with this Barrington. He ran as far as the gate by the seashore. He had forgotten that he had not the key of any of the gates. He looked over this, and could see that no one was visible on the beach. He ought to have remembered that the other gate, which was on the Little Chilworth side, was much more likely to be the one where she might be found. He had to run half-way back to the Hall before he reached the spot where the road branched off to this other gate. He ran all the way, but it, too, was locked. It was much higher than the other, but by climbing a little he could see over it; and he saw Barbara and a gentleman, whom he of course easily guessed to be no other than Mr. Lewis Barrington.

They were walking leisurely along the lane which led to the Hall. She had shut the gate, and taken the key with her, so he could not follow. She was within an easy walk of the Hall, and he had to go round by the dene, and to cross gardens and grounds. She would be at home long before he was, so perforce he relinquished all idea of interfering with her *tête-à-tête*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“Does the road wind uphill all the way?”

“Yes, to the very end.”

“Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?”

“From morn to night, my friend.”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

Prometheus. ‘Tis an easy matter for anyone that hath his foot unentangled by suffering, both to exhort and admonish him that is in evil case.’

WENTWORTH saw nothing of his cousin until just before dinner. The sun was sinking fast, but was powerful even in death, though from the far end of the great drawing-room at Chilworth little could be seen of its strength or beauty beyond the way in which it shone on some great clusters of china-roses outside the window, and made their faint pink petals blaze out in crimson splendour.

Barbara did not come down until a few minutes before dinner was announced. Angry as he was with her, she had made herself look so pretty in a cool soft Indian muslin dress, illustrated, as our forefathers would have said, by a couple of white water-lilies, that he could not but smile when he saw her.

Immediately afterwards he recollected her misdeeds, and was as angry as ever, but he was very glad that he had smiled, for he began to think little Miss Barbara so clever, that without liberal use of dissimulation he would have no chance whatever of being a match for her.

‘How beautiful you do look, Barby!’ said he; and then a jealous thought struck him, and he said, ‘Who gave you those water-lilies? for none grew within many miles of Chilworth.’

‘I gave a boy sixpence for them—a boy I met in the lane.’

‘In the lane! Oh, where you there? I thought you were in quite a different direction. I followed you down the dene as far as the gate on to the sands, but I could get no further, and was savage. But you say you were in the lane.’

‘Yes, I was in the lane.’

‘Then I could not have found you even if I had been able to get through the gate. By-the-bye, mother, as I am going to stay here, don’t you think I might be allowed to have one of the keys of the gate to carry about with me? One feels so helpless when one comes to a great strong door and can’t open it.’

‘Yes, my dear, of course you ought to have one. You shall have anything I can give you, I am sure. I wish you had not been disappointed. It must have been beautiful on the shore!’

‘The same key opens all the gates; but there are only two keys,’ said Barbara.

‘Yes, only two,’ echoed Mrs. Wilbraham; ‘and I let the gardener have one of them. The other is supposed to hang in the hall; but I think it is very often to be found in Barbara’s pocket.’

'I suppose you let the gardener have one that he may get quickly to the public-house. His poor wife was complaining this morning of his going so often to the Wild Hawk. Perhaps that's why I want a key—perhaps I want to go to the Wild Hawk too: and perhaps that's what Barby uses hers for.'

And under the shelter of an apparently generally benevolent expression of countenance, he fixed on Barbara the most piercing glance of which his dull eyes were capable.

She blushed, and then was angry with herself for being so silly, and with him for being so vulgar. She had no idea he intended anything by this but a jest, and began to think that it was extremely probable, if he stayed long at home, that his mother would discover he was nothing but a coarse, common-place, dissipated young man.

Mrs. Wilbraham seemed as yet to see nothing of the kind, and said simply:

'Oh no, Wentworth: the gardener has the key because he must have one. The other is kept for all of us. Barbara sometimes has it, so have I; but we always put it back when we come in. It hangs in the hall, just by the door on the right-hand side. I am very particular about its being kept in its place. You will always find it there.'

'Is it there now?' he asked, for he could not help thinking that Barbara looked very uncomfortable.

'Of course it is,' said his mother. 'It is always put back at once.'

'What will you bet that it is not there now?'

'We don't bet, dear,' replied Mrs. Wilbraham, with gentle dignity.

'I'll go and look,' said he, for Barbara appeared still more uneasy.

'It is not there,' said she. 'I have not put it back yet.'

'She has lent it to this Barrington,' thought Wentworth. 'I'll stake my life on it she has!'

'Where is it then, Barby?' he inquired. 'Upstairs?'

Barbara was struggling to find an answer which would satisfy him and yet be truthful, when Mrs. Wilbraham, who thought it beneath the dignity of her son to be so pertinacious about a mere trifle, showed her disapproval of his curiosity by interrupting Barbara's answer just as its first word was trembling on her lips.

'Barbara,' said she, 'where is Katherine? Don't you see that she is keeping dinner waiting? It won't be announced until she is here.'

'Oh, aunt, I forgot! I beg your pardon! She is not coming down. She hopes you will excuse her. She has such a bad headache.'

'Then ring for dinner,' said Mrs. Wilbraham.

'They are in league to deceive me,' thought Wentworth. 'Barbara has lent the key to that fellow Barrington, and my mother knows it, and is screening her.'

Oddly enough, his suspicion was for once well founded, the only point on which he was wrong was in thinking that his mother was an accomplice. Everybody suspected Mrs. Wilbraham, because all

knew that she had written some 'important' letters, and done some 'hard thinking.' Barbara had seen two, Wentworth had received one.

That very afternoon the two girls, who knew that those letters had brought both Wentworth and Barrington to Chilworth, had gone out, firmly possessed with the idea that the poor old lady had again been taking some step which she deemed likely to be advantageous to one of them.

The most probable theory was that she had written to ask Barrington to come and speak to her that afternoon, intending, perhaps, to insist on Katherine's seeing him afterwards. Mrs. Wilbraham did these things so cleverly and secretly that the girls could but guess at them, but to-day she was so determined to be left alone, and sat looking so serenely innocent, and showed so little inclination to give anyone trouble, that they felt certain she must have some great work on hand. She sent them into the dene, and lest she should betray where they were to one or other of the lovers whom she was taking such pleasure in assisting, they went into a very out-of-the-way part of it. They crossed the foot-bridge, and then went down to the edge of the stream and sat on the bank in a sheltered place where they could not be seen, and could themselves see little else than two or three velvety brown rats as, one by one, they came out of their sheltering holes by the side, peered around to see that none but friends were near, and then swam across the water.

Katherine was very sad and thoughtful, Barbara not too happy. They sat hand in hand, but did not speak much, though once or twice Barbara used every argument in her power to persuade Katherine to accept Barrington and be happy.

'Impossible!' said Katherine. 'I don't deserve to be happy! Let me punish myself for my weakness. I ought. The dearest, kindest father in the world asked me as a favour to him not to see Lewis for six months, and I promised I would not, and broke my word; that six months ought to be multiplied and re-multiplied now, and even then I shall not have expiated my fault. I should have my father now, if I had but kept my promise.'

'You are imposing more suffering on yourself than you can bear. I often watch you, dear, when you don't know it. Katherine, you are very miserable! I see how you suffer.'

'I don't suffer more than I ought. I only suffer when I think of the dreadful past, and when I am wishing to see Lewis again. I love you and your aunt, and feel like one of you—don't think I want to get away from Chilworth.'

'Aunt is very tiresome.'

'Yes, but she is warm-hearted and very good to me. I really love her. Ought we not to be going home? We have been here two hours.'

'Two happy, peaceful hours! We ought to go, though.'

They began to climb the hill, and as they went, their dresses shook

out the seeds of the wild hyacinths which had made the bank so blue in spring.

‘I do believe that some one is knocking at that door!’ said Barbara. They were not far from the door leading into the Chilworth lane, and possibly their voices might be heard so far. ‘I am sure some one is knocking. I’ll go and see who it is.’

In a moment she was gone. Katherine followed slowly, and had just reached the door when Barbara opened it to Lewis Barrington. Barbara would have known who it was even without Katherine’s exclamation, ‘Oh, Lewis!’ At the first glance Barbara made up her mind that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen, Coventry Carew not excepted,

He hurried forward and took both Katherine’s hands in his, saying:

‘I heard your voice! I was sure I heard it.’

She drew them away in a moment, and left him without either a word or a look. She was gone almost before he suspected her intention.

‘Stay, Katherine, stay!’ cried Barbara, but Katherine never looked round.

Barrington could, of course, have followed, but he abstained from forcing his company on her. Barbara was about to go, but she could not but see how disappointed he looked, and wished to say one word of kindness to him.

‘I wish Katherine had stayed!’ said she. ‘She might have waited a minute or two.’

‘She might! I should not have come North at all if I had not received a very kind invitation from Mrs. Wilbraham—your aunt, I believe, for I presume I am addressing Miss Linley. She invited me to pay her a visit at her house. She did not say it was so, but there was always the hope that this invitation might have been given because Katherine, Miss Carey I ought to say, had withdrawn her refusal to see me.’

‘I am so sorry to say so, but I don’t think Katherine knew anything about my aunt’s letter. I am sure she did not. Aunt saw some people at Harrogate who told her a great deal about you and Katherine, and she knows and likes your books and loves Katherine, and was seized with a desire to make you both happy. She did not tell either Katherine or me that she was going to write to you.’

‘Then I hoped without reason. Tell Katherine that I trust she will forgive me for this meeting. It was quite by chance that I came to this door. I received her letter this morning, and knew I was not to come to the Hall, but I was wandering round the place where she has buried herself, that I might carry away some little idea of what it was like, and I heard her voice. She must forgive me for trying to see her.’

'She ought to see you,' said Barbara warmly. 'It's a great shame she doesn't. You might persuade her to listen to you if you had but a chance of speaking to her. As it is, she just hardens herself in her resolution.' And having said this in the first heat of sympathy, she stopped in great confusion, for her pity for Barrington was leading her so much further than she intended.

He saw what was in her mind, and smiled kindly enough at the generous little creature who was so well disposed to help him.

'Don't be afraid to speak to me—I am glad you know about this. You say that I ought to speak to her—I only wish that I saw my way to doing so! She won't see me!—she refuses; but I dare say it would be all the same if she did not refuse.'

'Oh, no! it would not. I am sure you could persuade her to give up making herself miserable. I believe she only runs away from you because she knows if she stays she will yield. She dares not see you.'

'You don't really think so?' exclaimed Barrington, looking all at once twice as handsome as before, for this little gleam of hope.

'Yes, I do. I ought not to say so, perhaps, but I can't bear to see people unhappy when there is no occasion for it.'

He was silent for a minute, but was studying his new friend's appearance from head to foot. He wanted to know how much reliance could be placed in her. 'She is frank, truthful, staunch: not strong-minded, or self-reliant, but strong-hearted. Weak, probably, where her own affairs are concerned, but strong for others. I like her, and am thankful that Katherine has such a girl near her,' thought he; then he said:

'Miss Linley, I am going to ask a great deal of you; but do you think that in any way you could contrive to give me an opportunity for saying two or three words to Katherine? If you could let me see her even for ten minutes, it would be of immense service to me. I am sure you would if you could,' he added, for he saw that she was in some difficulty, 'so don't be afraid to say no, if you think it can't be done.'

'It is dreadfully difficult to do the commonest thing in our house,' replied Barbara, 'for our time is all claimed by my aunt. Neither Katherine nor I ever venture to form the most trifling plan, for we must do what she asks us, and she herself never knows what she is going to do until the time comes; this afternoon we are free because she wanted to be alone, but such a thing has not happened for twelve months or more—one of us must always be with her to get what she wants and read to her, and sometimes both of us; still, I think we might steal away for a very short time—perhaps this very evening, only it would have to be late. The worst is, there are so many people to contend with before you can see Katherine; she herself would decline to meet you if she knew such a thing was proposed! and my aunt must not be told, though she, I believe, would help

you. I have a cousin, too, who is very tiresome, and does nothing but watch us. We are never safe from him ! I can only think of one way in which it could be managed—I think if you were to come through the dene to the wicket-gate which leads into—— Oh, Mr. Barrington ! what shall we do ? I do believe my cousin is coming now ! Some one is ! I hear quick steps on the other side of the dene—there is a path on the other side, but you can't see across for the trees. It must be Wentworth, and if he comes here and finds you with me, it will be dreadful !

She seemed about to hurry away from Barrington, but he said :

‘Don't leave me ! Don't go away until we have arranged something definite ; you said you could perhaps bring Katherine to the wicket-gate to-night. Where is this wick——’

‘Oh, do hush ! I am so afraid ! Stop, come through this door into the lane ;—be quick, and then I'll shut the door gently. He can't follow us, for he has no key, unless he has borrowed the gardener's, and that's not likely.’

Barbara's quick ear had served her well ; she had just retreated in time to escape her cousin. Once outside the door, she thought that, as she was already late, she might as well return home by the lane as not. They walked on, therefore, and as she was quite unaware that Wentworth had clambered up on the bars at the back of the door and had seen her, she was soon sufficiently at her ease to say to Barrington :

‘Well, as I explained before, the only safe way for you to meet Katherine would be for me to bring her to the wicket between the hall-garden and the dene, and you to come there by way of the dene. You can't do that though, unless I give you the key of the door we have come through. Shut it when you go in, and put the key in your pocket, for there are two other doors, and you might want to go out by one of them ; besides, some one might follow you if you didn't. You saw the path while we were talking ; follow it downhill till you come to a small stone bridge over the stream ; it is not far, you will soon come to it. Cross it and go up the hill on the other side, and walk straight on until your path joins one from the house to the sea. Turn to the left when you reach this new path, and then walk on uphill and down until you reach the gate which leads into our garden. Stop at the gate ; don't come into the garden ; you might be seen from the windows. It is quite an easy walk, and you won't be more than ten minutes in going from the first door to the garden-gate ; but you must promise me not to go off the footpath. It is dangerous to do that !’

‘Man-traps and spring-guns,’ said he gaily. He was beginning to feel very happy.

‘Oh no ; but ever so many old disused coal-pits, and places where shafts have been sunk for pits that were never gone on with. There are none on this side of the stream, so you need not be so particular there ; but there are fourteen or fifteen on the other.’

‘But are these pits great yawning openings that you have nothing to do but fall into?’

‘Oh, dear no! They are nothing very formidable. But don’t reveal that; for we at the Hall like to make the worst of them—we find our pits very useful; they help to keep away people who have no business in the grounds.’

‘Such as I?’

‘Yes, such as you,’ she said with a smile, ‘and poachers, and perhaps even burglars, for the pits are all round the house; but, Mr. Barrington, they are nothing. There are perhaps three dangerous ones, but all the rest are only twenty or thirty feet deep, and a great many have been filled up.’

‘And your dangerous ones—how deep are they?’

‘A hundred and twenty, or thirty, or fifty feet deep, I don’t know exactly; but there is a great deal of water at the bottom of them.’

‘Does that make it pleasanter to fall into them?’

He could not but be amused and astonished to see how familiarity with these disagreeable neighbours had blunted this young north-country lady’s perception of their horrors until she treated them as carelessly as if they were of no account.

‘You can’t fall into them,’ said she; ‘there is some railing round the deep ones; besides, they are quite off the path, and in places where no one is expected to go. It is easy enough to know when you are on the path, if it’s ever so dark, for it is the only part that is hard and solid; all the rest is uneven and over-grown with long grass, and ferns, and briars, and brambles; they scratch dreadfully, and wouldn’t leave you long in doubt as to where you were. Still, I’ll tell you what you might do. We dine at seven, and while we are at dinner, and it is safe to wander about, you had better return to the dene and thoroughly explore the path, and then you will have no difficulty whatever in coming afterwards.’

‘That’s a capital idea, and I’ll follow your advice; for, however lightly you talk of your pits that are only twenty or thirty feet deep, my own feeling is that if I fell into one of them, I should not see much of either Katherine or of you for many hours afterwards. At what hour am I to be at the garden-gate?’

‘At ten, I think; yes, ten—that’s the time my aunt goes to her room. I will try to bring Katherine to you then; but wait a little for us if we don’t seem to be coming, for I might be kept, or she might not be able to get away at once. One of us has to go to my aunt’s room at half-past ten to see if she wants anything, and sometimes she wants some particular poem she has been thinking of found and read to her, or something else that takes time; but if once I can persuade Katherine to come and speak to you, all else will arrange itself. There is another thing to consider; my cousin might be in the way, and then we should be later.’

‘I will wait the whole night rather than miss this chance,’ said

he. 'You have arranged everything admirably, for you can easily come as far as the garden, and in such weather as this, it will be the only cool place.'

'Now you must leave me,' said she; 'we are getting very near the house, and no one ought to see you. By-the-bye, on second thoughts, don't come quite so far as the gate; stay on the other side of it somewhere in the dark. I am so afraid of my cousin prowling about. There is a large tree close beside it, hide yourself behind that; and, Mr. Barrington, if we should happen never to come at all, don't be too much disappointed. However, I think if Katherine will but come, we are certain to be there sometime.'

'Thank you. I am not expressing much gratitude, but I am feeling it.'

'I hope I am not doing wrong,' thought Barbara, as she went in. 'I have let myself be terribly led away by pity for those two, and interest in their story. He is charming! I do wonder how she can be so hard-hearted to him, poor fellow.'

She went to see Katherine, and found her much too ill and miserable to go downstairs. She was unhappier than Barbara had ever seen her before.

'He ought to keep away from me,' said she. 'It is so cruel to make me have the pain of refusing him so often.'

'It is very wrong of you to refuse him; you ought not to treat him so ill—you have no right to treat a fellow creature so unreasonably.'

'You don't understand--no one but myself can understand. He ought not to come! My father prophesied that he would prove my curse,' continued Katherine, 'and somehow I feel as if his words were coming true.'

'It is my opinion that you are proving your own curse,' said the practical Miss Barbara. 'If you won't take happiness when it is offered you, what can you expect?'

Katherine hung her head despondently; Barbara kissed her and thought: 'You dear, silly girl, you are not aware that a much more sensible person than either yourself or my aunt has now taken your affairs in hand, and that you won't be allowed to make yourself unhappy much longer.'

Wentworth drank a great deal during dinner. Mrs. Wilbraham saw him emptying glass after glass, but she thought it was impossible that he could be taking so much wine, and that he must have adopted her plan of having toast and water put in a decanter beside him.

'Is that toast and water, dear?' she asked.

'Of course it is,' he replied, with an amused grin at Barbara.

'I am so glad to see you taking it,' said she; 'it is much better than wine, especially when iced. Half the wine which is drunk is only taken because people are thirsty and can't get water readily,

and the wine makes them much more thirsty. Now, isn't it nicer, my dear boy ?

'Much ! my dear mother,' replied Wentworth, pouring out another bumper of sherry, and winking to Barbara to make her enjoy his mother's mistake with him.

He would have perished rather than drink such a meagre beverage as toast and water. What ideas women had, especially women who inhabited the country !

Barbara looked very angry. The coachman's epithet, 'horrid young swallering chap,' rose to her mind, and she thought it would be a most blessed thing for this unpleasant cousin of hers, if wine and unseemly compounds called 'splits,' things for which he seemed to have an urgent necessity every two hours, could be taken from him for ever. Wentworth stayed long in the dining-room ; even Mrs. Wilbraham began to think his conduct was not quite what it ought to be.

'Barbara, dear,' said she kindly, 'I hope that by this time you see that it won't do for you to go on harassing that dear boy's feelings much longer. He can't be drinking toast and water now. He would not sit there alone if he were only drinking toast and water. If you don't take care you will make a drunkard of him.'

'Don't say I do it. It's not my fault, and I won't be answerable for it. He never drinks toast and water, aunt ; he was not drinking it at dinner when you thought he was.'

'What he takes never gets into his head, that's one good thing, though he ought to drink less. What a heavenly night it is !'

She was actually admiring the night ! There was no getting it into Mrs. Wilbraham's head that her favourite son could do wrong—all such thoughts glided off her—nothing but love for him found a resting-place in her mind.

'What a heavenly night it is !' she again said. 'Let us enjoy it in the garden.'

They stepped out of a window which was exquisitely framed with festoons of white clematis on to the smoothly mown lawn. Not a trace of damp was perceptible anywhere. The sultry heat which had been so oppressive all day was gone, and now the air, though soft and warm and heavily laden with the scent of flowers, was refreshing. It was so delicious that Barbara began to fear that her aunt would not want to go into the house for hours. They walked up and down, and round and round ; once they even passed the wicket-gate, which was, as Barbara hoped, so soon to be the scene of a meeting which would repay Barrington and Katherine for all that they had suffered. Suppose he were there now, and in the darkness went so far as to mistake Mrs. Wilbraham's commanding figure for that of his slim Katherine ? The very idea made Barbara avoid that corner of the garden.

'You must be tired, aunt,' said she.

'I? no; I could stay out for ever.'

Hereupon more pacing backwards and forwards, and more anxiety on Barbara's part lest this enthusiasm should last too long.

'It is an ecstasy to be alive on such a night. Are there any stars, Barbara?'

'None,' said Barbara sadly—not that she wanted stars.

'It is very beautiful without them—don't mind there being none, dear child'—for Mrs. Wilbraham detected the tone of sadness—'Barbara, I will tell you what I see, and then will you tell me how much I miss? I am not fretting about my want of sight, only I like to know. A strange dark purple dome seems to be above me—it seems made on purpose to enclose this lawn—I see nothing more. I like the mystery and sense of loneliness it gives. You see more, I imagine.'

'No dear, I don't. I see exactly what you do, and some great black shapes of trees. One thing I see which you don't, and that is Wentworth: he has shut all the windows, and is still sitting in the dining-room with the decanters before him.'

Barbara thought that the mention of closed windows would be almost certain to send her aunt in to open them, though she would probably find an excuse for the decanters.

'I'll go in and make him open the windows,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, 'or I'll bring him out.'

'And I will go to Katherine.'

Wentworth had emptied all the decanters and wanted more wine.

'Oh no,' said Mrs. Wilbraham; 'it is late, and Barbara has the cellar-key. She would think it so odd if you said you wanted more.'

'Barbara seems to keep all the keys!' he exclaimed, for now he suddenly remembered what had for some time slipped out of his mind, that she had done something mysterious with the key of the dene, and that it behoved him to be on the alert. He was so absorbed by this thought that he forgot to insist on having the wine. His mother imagined that this happy change was due to his interest in a very poetical description she had begun to give him of the beauty of the night, of which, it is needless to say, he had not heard a word.

'Mother,' said he persuasively, and not at all aware that he was breaking into the middle of it, 'I want you to tell me if that man you wrote to warn me about is called Barrington?'

'My dear, what do you know about anyone of that name?'

'Not much, except this, that I am sure there is something going on between him and Barbara.'

'I give you my word there is not! On my honour, there is not! Do believe me when I assure you of this, Wentworth. Good-night, dear, I am going to bed.'

'She was far too solemn in her manner,' thought Wentworth,

when he was left alone. 'The moment she denied it in such a tragedy-queen manner, I knew I had guessed her secret.'

'Do you want anything, aunt?' inquired Barbara, putting her head in at Mrs. Wilbraham's bedroom door about half-an-hour later.

'No, dear—at least there is one thing I really should like. If you would just look out something in "Sir Charles Grandison" for me. I want the exact passage where Miss—Miss—I forget her name, but she is his sister—I want the passage where she laughs at men who have a fancy for collecting china. She thinks it ridiculously effeminate to care for it!'

'My dear aunt! Look through all those great big volumes at this time of night!'

'It sounds much worse than it is, for the paragraph I want occurs in one of Sir Charles's sister's letters, and there are not many of hers. Besides, I can almost tell you where to find it. It is on the left side of the page, half-way down the left hand column; but wait till the morning, if you are tired.'

'Then I'll do it to-morrow, dear. Good-night,' said Barbara, and went.

'If Katherine had been almost dying of fatigue, she would not have let me wait until to-morrow for a thing I wanted to-night,' said Mrs. Wilbraham to herself, but she said it for the sake of praising Katherine, and not with the least desire to blame poor tired Barbara. Poor tired Barbara had a little adventure on hand which seemed more appropriate to the romantic aunt than to the matter-of-fact niece. Now she went to Katherine, and said:

'Will you come into the garden for ten minutes? It will do your head good.'

'No, thank you, I'd rather not.'

'I think it would do my head good, if you would,' said Barbara. 'My head aches too.'

'Why didn't you say so at first, dear?—of course I'll come. Isn't it late, though?'

'Yes, it's late. I have been walking up and down with aunt, and hearing about Wentworth.'

'Oh!' cried Katherine penitently. 'I ought not to have left you everything to do. I ought to have gone down. You have been worried.'

'Rather. Come into the garden, the house is unbearably warm, but it is cool and delightful there. What an emotional day we have had!'

It is very easy to find a way out of any country house, even though it may have been shut up for the night. They had only to undo two bolts in the breakfast-room window, and step out.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'I fear too early, for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revel.'

Romeo and Juliet.

'The rustling leaf doth their white hearts affray.'

CHATTERTON.

BARBARA took Katherine's hand and led her close under the house and in its shadow, and then along the darkest side of the garden.

'For fear of Wentworth,' she whispered to her. 'He has been so odious all day!'

'Do you mean that you don't want him to know that we have come out!'

'Of course I don't want him to know it! He must not know anything about us.'

'But, Barbara dear, I can't help thinking that he has seen us already! I am sure I heard footsteps whilst I was following you out of the window. I may be mistaken, but I am almost certain he was somewhere near.'

'Not really? I am afraid if he was in the hall, he would hear us unfastening the bolts,' said Barbara, trembling already. 'Do you really think he was?—oh, no, you must be mistaken, for he went to bed when aunt did; I met him on the stairs, and heard him shut and bolt his door. Besides, look, you can see his candle burning.'

'You can see our candles burning,' observed Katherine, 'and yet we are not in our rooms.'

'Then don't let us speak another word,' said Barbara, in a whisper. 'Just let us creep away under the shadow of the filbert-trees to the seat under the tulip-tree, and sit down and watch for a while. None of us ever seem to care much for this walk, or to sit in that corner, so he won't look for us there if he is out, and has happened to see us.'

That was Barbara's fear, for if he had, it was because he was in search of them, and if he was in search of them it was terrible! They went to the seat beneath the tulip-tree—a pleasant seat at any time, and doubly so now, because so far from the house, and far, too, from the wicket into the dene.

The lawn, as before said, was bounded on the north side by this broad belt of filbert trees, and on the south by Mrs. Wilbraham's cherished old-fashioned flower-borders, and at the end of the broad gravel-walk which ran between these borders was the wicket into the dene, by which Barbara had told Lewis Barrington to wait.

That dangerous spot being therefore in the right-hand corner of the garden, it seemed prudent to place themselves in the corner exactly opposite. To Katherine, who had only come out to seek

relief from a bad headache, Barbara's precautions seemed somewhat overstrained and unnecessary, but she was in no mood for questioning, and made no remark.

The night was very dark ; they could see nothing but black masses of trees and shrubs, and wide tracts of mysterious shade, and some faint mist-wreaths lying on the slopes beneath the hill. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers ; but after the sultry heat of the bygone day, the damp cool air was inexpressibly refreshing.

They sat for a long time without venturing to say a word. Suddenly, however, Barbara was relieved by seeing Wentworth's shadow crossing and re-crossing the blinds of his bedroom windows. Very soon afterwards, to her great delight, she saw him extinguish his candle.

'I knew you were wrong, Katherine,' said she joyously ; 'he was in his room all the while, you see.'

'I suppose I was ; but then I never said I was quite sure. Had we not better go in ?'

'Perhaps,' replied Barbara ; 'but how balmy the air is !'

She rose and took Katherine's hand, and led her slowly along the walk by the sunk fence towards the wicket-gate.

'You hold me as if you were afraid of my running away,' said Katherine. 'Are you afraid of being left alone in the dark ?' Barbara, I am so surprised at you, who are always so timid ! I had no idea you would dare to walk about in the dark in this way. I know that we are not likely to see anyone to alarm us ; but if such a thing did happen ?'

'If it did,' replied Barbara, who did not exactly see anyone, but was almost certain that she heard some one moving, 'we must not be too much afraid. Katherine, I wanted to tell you something—there was a confession I wanted to make, but this foolish little alarm about Wentworth has made me forget everything else. Katherine, I can only entreat you not to scream if anything does happen that you are not prepared for. Take it quietly—don't scream. Will you promise me that ? Will you ? Will you ?' she continued nervously, for under a tall tree by the side of the wicket, she, who knew that he must be somewhere near, thought she saw Lewis Barrington.

'What do you mean ?' exclaimed Katherine ; and as she spoke, a sudden and strong suspicion of the truth flashed into her mind, and she turned round and tried to release her hand from Barbara's.

'I mean nothing—that is, nothing bad ; only there is just the chance that some one who loves you very much, and who is never allowed to have a glimpse of you, might have prevailed on me to help him a little. There, Mr. Barrington,' said she ; 'there ! I said I would bring her, and I have brought her ;' and without a moment's delay, she thrust Katherine's struggling hand into his, and ran away, saying, 'Stay where you are, Katherine ; I'll wait for you by the tulip-tree.'

Katherine at once felt that her hand was in a grasp from which she could not break loose. She made no effort to do so. This had come on her so suddenly, that she had had no time to prepare herself for it. But she was weary of struggle. The day had been one long struggle—the whole year had been the same : he was there, and he loved her ! How much she loved him none but herself knew—none must ever know. It seemed so strange to have him back—so natural to feel her hand in his—so impossible to believe that in a very short time he must leave her, and all be as if she had not had this brief but happy meeting.

To his great delight, he felt that this time she did not seem to want to escape from him.

‘You forgive me for this?’ he whispered.

‘Yes, I forgive you,’ she replied, in a low, calm voice.

‘And you will stay with me for a while?’

‘Yes, a little while.’

‘Thank you. I want so to speak to you—to speak seriously, and must have time to say all. I want to tell you how unhappy you have made me by persisting in this resolution not to see me. I have never pressed my wishes on you till now. On the contrary, I have yielded to yours—yours alone have been consulted and respected. I have let you come here and live with these Wilbrahams, and banish me from you for more than a year, and have scarcely raised my voice to protest against it, for I hoped all the time that in some way or other you would be the happier for doing so.’

‘Not happier, Lewis ; you know as well as I do that I don’t want to be happy.’

‘Perhaps not ; but you wanted to get some good out of it—to appease the stings of conscience, or to obtain peace of mind in one way, by dint of undergoing suffering in another.’

‘Yes,’ she answered very humbly, ‘that was my wish.’

‘And have you obtained this?’

‘No, no, no ! but, at all events, I have the comfort of knowing I am not happy when I don’t deserve to be so. Happy ! Oh, Lewis, I have been wretched !’

He put his arm round her and drew her a little nearer to him. She took this passively, but he dared not fold her to his heart—he must not shock her now, or she might dart away, and all would then be as if this meeting had never taken place.

‘In what way have you been wretched, dear ? Tell me. You can talk to me, you know ; tell me.’

‘I’ve been most wretched away from you, with new people, who, though very kind, were not the people of my heart. I have longed to be with you until it has been agony. Many a night I have cried myself to sleep.’

‘And you endured this, dear, because you thought you had done wrong ?’

'Because I knew that I had done wrong.'

'And it cost you great pain? You own that?'

'Torture!'

'A torture you would not have inflicted on anyone else, or on yourself either if you had done no wrong?'

'Certainly not, because unless undergone voluntarily and with a special object, it would have been perfectly unendurable.'

'When you look back on the past, Katherine, do you consider my conduct as bad as your own?'

'I? No; your conduct was hardly bad at all.'

'Then,' said he, and he had been leading up to this for some time, 'why do you make me bear the same terrible punishment as yourself? You start, darling, as if this was a new idea; but have you not known that you have robbed me of all that I cared for? I have not known a day's happiness since I last saw you! All for a mistaken idea, too, for neither you nor I were half so much to blame as you think. A great many bad things that had no connection with each other happened together. They happened quite independently of each other, but you choose to connect them.'

'They were connected,' said Katherine doggedly. 'If they were not, I should not reproach myself so. You speak as if you knew all about it, Lewis, but I know more than you, for I had a great deal of conversation with my poor father.'

'Well, but even supposing you were as much to blame as you imagine yourself to be, and had done what made a life of expiation and atonement in some degree necessary, I do not think, dear, that you were free to enter on such a life. No one can be free to do such a thing but one who stands alone—you don't stand alone—you never can, my darling, while I live, for I love you now and for ever; and you can't live such a life without making me share it. Katherine, I do not believe that you have done anything that requires a life-long expiation, and I am quite certain that I have not. You yourself have just owned that I have not, and yet you seem willing to doom me to it. I am never to have a wife, or a home. I am to spend my days in bewailing your loss, in pining to see you, and chafing under the injustice of being condemned to pay such a heavy penalty. I know I did wrong, but you are making me suffer too much for it. Katherine, before a woman dooms a man to such a lot as this, she ought to obtain his consent to it.'

He felt her faltering hand laid on his arm.

'Lewis,' she said with great emotion, 'forgive me—you shock me. I did not know—I had no idea I was doing anything so cruel to you!'

'You knew I loved you—you must have known that—did you think my heart was made of stone?'

She turned to him in great distress and said:

'I am afraid I have been very selfish; but if you did but know——'

'I do know, dear,' he replied tenderly. 'I know how you have

reproached yourself and suffered. My heart has ached for you ! It was because I did know so well what you were feeling that I made so little opposition to your wish to live away from me. You can't say that I have murmured or reproached you ; but you surely don't want me to bear this much longer ? It can't go on for ever. Katherine, I am wretched.'

His words were uttered in an accent which carried conviction to her heart. She could just see by his attitude how anxiously he was waiting for her answer.

'I yield,' said she. 'Lewis, I will do as you wish. I cannot struggle against you.'

And having said this, she laid her head on his shoulder, and tried to hide that she was weeping. She could neither check her tears nor hide them. The repressed emotion of so many months completely overmastered her.

'Don't mind my crying,' said she, after a pause. 'It has been so miserable to be parted from you. I have tried so hard to be patient.'

He stooped and kissed her.

'Forget about it,' said he soothingly ; 'you have borne up most bravely, and must have suffered terribly ; now, you are mine, and shall see how truly I love you.'

'I am so happy to be with you ; I only hope I am not doing wrong.'

'Wrong ? no, you have never acted so rightly ; banish those morbid ideas of yours, and let us be happy. I must get you away from that Mrs. Wilbraham and her caprices as soon as possible. I have heard of her and of her tiresome ways from Nancy. What a miserable time you must have had !'

'Oh no, she is very kind, and if she were not, it would have made no difference, for I went to her as a punishment.'

'Let me hear no more of that word,' said Barrington impatiently. 'Dear Katherine, let all that be over.'

'It shall be over,' said she ; 'but do you despise me for under-going it ?'

'Despise you ? I admire you inexpressibly for being willing to suffer for conscience' sake. What you have voluntarily undergone during these last two weary years has changed you from a sweet gentle girl into a noble woman. I remember you used to say that you had no power of endurance, but were as weak as water, but you have shown the stuff you are made of. Katherine, dear, I had no idea that you had such patience and courage ! Frank says he had. We often talk of you, and he says that the first time he recognized your true character was once when you were sitting to him. At that time you had never known what it was to do anything you did not like ; but you suddenly discovered that it was your duty to sit well and help him to make a good picture of you, and you did it splendidly. Katherine, you do love me ?' he added, with a sudden transition which will not seem unnatural to lovers.

‘Love you?’ she exclaimed fervently; ‘yes, with all my heart! God grant we may be happy!’

‘Do you doubt it? You seem to be rather faint-hearted about our prospects in that way.’

She was thinking—in spite of herself she was thinking—of her father’s words: ‘Katherine, that man has been your curse, and will be so to the end.’

They were dismal words to think of at such a time. She made haste to drive them out of her mind, and return some suitable answer. Why should she not? Such a speech was unjust to her lover, and to dwell on it at this moment was superstitious. She was no longer a child; her heart had chosen him, and for him she would live or die.

‘I must go,’ said she presently; ‘I really must leave you.’

‘I am afraid you must. I will call to see Mrs. Wilbraham to-morrow, and will ask her how soon she will let me carry you away. I shall be for ever grateful to that dear little Miss Linley. I do hope she won’t be tired of pacing about the garden so long.’

‘Pacing about the garden?’ repeated Katherine in some surprise, for she believed Barbara to be sitting under the tulip-tree.

‘Yes—there, don’t you see her? She has been rambling about in all directions. There, look!’ and Barrington, who had Katherine’s hand in his, used her own pretty fingers to point out to her a dark figure, which he believed to be Barbara, walking backwards and forwards in front of the house.

The night was so dark, that this figure was hardly discernible except when it crossed a bit of open lawn immediately in front of the house.

‘That’s not Barbara,’ whispered Katherine, though she was quite beyond earshot. ‘That is some one much taller than she. It is a man! It’s that dreadful Wentworth Wilbraham!’

‘Never mind him! I suppose he no more wants to see us than we want to see him. Tell me before we part if you think Mrs. Wilbraham will make any difficulty about our getting married at once.’

‘I can’t think of that now. If Mr. Wilbraham is there, it is for the sake of watching poor Barbara. She will be in a terrible fright if she sees him! I must go to her at once—I really must!’

But at this moment Wentworth, who had been walking here and there, and peering into all dark corners, began to come towards them, walking down the middle of the lawn.

‘He has cut off my chance of getting to her!’ said Katherine. ‘What shall I do? Oh, Lewis, he really is coming!’

Her alarm almost surprised Barrington, who of course did not wish to be seen by him under the present circumstances, but was otherwise indifferent.

He drew her gently through the wicket, and a few steps along

the path down the dene ; under the shadow of those trees it would indeed be difficult for anyone to find them ; but Wentworth stumbled and fell while he was crossing the lawn, and when he got up again he turned back towards the house.

‘I must go,’ said Katherine. ‘I quite forgot the state he was in. Lewis, it is very horrible, but he is tipsy ; Barbara told me so. If he happens to find her, he will frighten her to death ! I’ll hurry to her while he is out of the way, and we will both go in.’

‘Good-night, then, dear ; you leave me very happy !’

Katherine was in such haste to get to Barbara, that she cut his leave-taking short. He went part of the way through the garden with her, but she was afraid to let him go far, so he returned to the entrance of the dene, and stood watching and listening.

She and Barbara were to steal quietly to the house, and wait until they saw a chance of re-entering unobserved. Wentworth was now invisible to Barrington ; so was Katherine, whose black dress did much to hide her from sight. All her way to the opposite corner of the garden was protected by thick shade, but one little piece ; when she had crossed that, he trusted she would be safe with Barbara.

Hardly, however, had she been gone three minutes before he heard a loud scream, and the next instant she came flying back, pursued by Wentworth.

Before Barrington could go to her rescue, she had rushed through the wicket, though Wentworth’s hand was almost on her as she did so. He stumbled again as he missed her, and fell heavily against the gate, uttering a frightful oath at his unexpected disappointment.

‘Oh, Lewis ! Lewis !’ she exclaimed ; and without giving Barrington even time to answer, she fled down the dene, taking no thought where she went.

Barrington stood for a minute divided between hurrying after her and staying where he was to keep Wentworth Wilbraham in check.

‘Lewis ! Lewis !’ repeated the latter, with another furious oath. ‘You may run away, madam, but I’ll have you ; and as for your Lewis, I have a pistol, and I warn him to look out !’

Then he got up, and with one of the odd freaks of a drunken man, again turned back, and made a few steps towards the Hall.

Seeing this, Barrington thought his own most pressing duty was to follow Katherine, and did so at once.

It was pitch dark in this part of the wood, and there was nothing to guide him but the sound of his own feet on the hard path, and besides that, no certainty that Katherine would keep to the path. On he went as quickly as he could, now dashing against the trunk of some tree, more often stumbling over intricacies of interlacing roots.

‘Katherine ! Katherine !’ he cried in his anguish, but no Katherine heard or answered.

Once or twice he fancied he heard a crashing of dry boughs as

her swift feet passed over them, but when he stopped to listen, all was still. Suddenly, but not before he had run nearly half a mile, the silence was broken by a most piercing shriek. It came from behind him, and was unaccompanied by any other sound. He darted back at once, crying :

‘Katherine ! Katherine ! where are you ? I am coming !’

At that very moment Katherine was struggling in the grasp of her pursuer. Barrington had taken the path which led to the shore ; she had fled by that which she and Barbara most frequented—that which led to the gate into the Chilworth lane, the same which their feet had traversed earlier in the day. She had reached the foot-bridge in safety, and had then resolved to hide in the very place on the bank where she and Barbara had sat that afternoon ; but before she could go further, she was obliged to rest for a while and recover herself.

Finding all so quiet, she began to think she had been foolish to run so far. A man in Wentworth’s condition would certainly not think of entering the dene, or if he did, she could hear him, and long before he approached her, conceal herself behind some tree. Nothing could be easier than to elude him if she did but retain her self-command.

Emboldened by the sense of security which the stillness of all around her did not fail to give, she formed the project of gradually making her way back to the Hall, by stealing from one safe hiding-place to another, and waiting and watching at each stage of her progress. She at once began to carry out this design, and after several halts reached the main path, where she again thought it prudent to stand for a while behind a large old tree.

All was still, and it seemed so easy to get back to the house—that haven of safety where she was now so painfully anxious to be—that she once more ventured forth, taking for the aim of this short sally, a tree at a little distance from the path ; she could just see the black mass of its huge trunk from the place where she was now standing. She crept cautiously towards it, ready to take flight at the least sound, reached it safely, and was just going to creep round it, when out darted Wentworth, who had been waiting for her behind this very tree, exclaiming as he seized her :

‘Now I have you, Barbara ! You might have known that you would not escape me !’

With a shriek that resounded through the whole wood, Katherine tore her dress from his clutch, and dashed up the steep bank, he following with all speed. She gained a spot at some little height above him, while he was still struggling with briars and brambles, which clasped him tightly in their meshes. Hoping to put an end to his pursuit of her, she paused here for an instant, to say :

‘Mr. Wilbraham, you think it is Barbara ! It is not Barbara ; it is Katherine Carey.’

'Oh, I dare say!' he replied. 'It was not Katherine Carey whom I saw having such a delightful walk with her lover in Chilworth lane this afternoon, and it's not Katherine Carey now.'

'It is—it is! Mr. Wilbraham, I assure you of it!'

'A very likely story! I suppose you think I will believe anything!'

He had paused, however, while scaling the bank, and was standing now holding on by a branch of one of the trees.

Katherine began to hope she might convince him.

'I am telling you the truth—I am indeed. Can't you hear by my voice that I am not Barbara? I tell you I am Katherine Carey.'

'Well, Katherine Carey is not at all a bad-looking girl,' replied he; 'and whoever you are, you have given me a precious lot of trouble, so I think the very least you can do is to give me half a dozen kisses for my pains—at all events I shall take them!' And having said that, he caught hold of a hazel-bough, which was hanging down near him, and pulled himself up the bank by its aid.

Katherine was in an agony of fear. The moon now showed some light, and the trees were not so thick—she felt as if she should never be able to escape from him! She was so terrified that her knees seemed to give way beneath her. Plunging, stumbling, scrambling, up came Wentworth. She did her best to get away before he reached the level ground, and struggled bravely onwards; but he was gaining on her, and jeeringly informed her of the fact, as step by step he came nearer.

'Lewis! Lewis!' again she cried in her despair, for she saw how near her enemy was.

'Ah, you like your Lewis's kisses better than you like mine; but you'll have to make yourself content with mine for the present, I can tell you!'

She nerved herself for a great effort, darted through a narrow opening between two trees, which was nearly choked up with masses of honeysuckle and ivy, and came out on a small piece of almost open ground.

Having put the slight barrier of these trees between herself and Wentworth Wilbraham, she had a faint hope of being able to get away amongst the dark trees on the other side before he could see which way she went. She dared not spend a second in choosing her route, ran on, and chanced on an entanglement of briars and brambles, lost her footing, and fell. She was up again immediately, but Wentworth Wilbraham was by her side.

'Oho! Miss Fly-by-night,' said he; 'I have you now, whether your name is Barbara or Katherine! Now, please to come to the light and let me see whose pretty lips I am going to have the pleasure of kissing!'

She shrieked, she resisted, she tried in every way to escape from him; but one of his hands was clasped tightly round her wrist, and

the other was round her waist, and he was forcing her back to the bit of open ground that he might see her face.

'Come along,' said he triumphantly. 'You will have to obey me, my lady!'

'Never!' exclaimed Katherine; but excitement and success made him so strong that all her efforts were unavailing.

'Let me go! Let me go! You are killing me!'

'Let you go!' he repeated. 'I should think not! Wait till you have paid your debts. Where are my kisses?' and he flung both his arms around her; but just as he was about to kiss her, he felt himself seized by the collar and violently dragged back from Katherine.

'Let that lady go!' cried Barrington furiously. 'Let her go this very moment!' and he seized Wentworth's arms and tried to make him relax his hold.

'Who are you, I should like to know?' roared Wentworth angrily. 'Stand back, I tell you! I'll not have you interfering with me!'

Barrington did not so much as hear his words—he could think of nothing but releasing Katherine. He thrust Wentworth back and tore her from him. Wentworth staggered, retreated a few steps, pulled a pistol out of his pocket, and cried:

'You leave us, or I'll fire! Stop, I think I'll shoot that girl anyhow, whoever she may be!' and to Barrington's horror he saw that Wentworth actually was aiming at Katherine.

Barrington sprang forward, seized his arm, and made a frantic effort to get possession of the pistol. There was a wild struggle for some moments, and then Katherine, who was watching in extreme agony, saw Barrington fling Wentworth backwards, and at the same time heard the report of a pistol and almost immediately after, a loud crash as of something breaking. Then all was still; both combatants had disappeared, and she was alone.

'Lewis! Lewis!' she cried.

Lewis did not return any answer now, nor did Wentworth mock her cry. Her anxiety was terrible; she could not endure it another instant, and ran to the spot where they had been struggling. Barrington was lying on the ground, wounded and unconscious, but not dead. Where was Wentworth? She was standing by a bit of circular railing which enclosed something—it flashed on her mind that this was one of the very deepest coalpits. One rail was snapped asunder by the weight of a heavy body falling on it; Barrington had flung Wentworth back on this rail, it had given way, and he had fallen headlong down the chasm, but, perhaps even in the act of falling backwards, he had shot Barrington.

CHAPTER XL.

'There's rue for you, and here's some for me.'

Hamlet.

'Scarce cheek that warmed, or breath on the air,
Yet something told that life was there.'

ROSSETTI.

SHE knelt down by Barrington's side and put her face to his to listen for his breathing. Thank God, she heard it! His head had struck against the trunk of a felled tree, and he was stunned by the blow—at least that was her hope, for she feared to think of the pistol-shot. She took his head on her lap, trembling to seek how grey his face looked in the faint wan moonlight.

'Lewis! Lewis, my darling Lewis!' she cried. 'Open your eyes—for God's sake open your eyes!'

She passed her hands over the wet grass, steeped them in its moisture, and laid them on his forehead; she called him tenderly by his name. He was breathing, but there was no other sign of life. Then she remembered that his head ought to be laid low, and she lifted it from her lap and laid him flat on the ground; in so doing, her hand touched something wet and horrible—a wound in his shoulder was bleeding. She did her best to staunch it. The moon now began to shine more brightly, and with a strange feeling that she was going through a piece of life which had no existence in reality, Katherine found herself looking on all that was around her as component parts of a horrible nightmare cruelly sent to torture her. She was sitting in the midst of a small circle of cleared ground—a fragment which seemed to have been cleared expressly to form the theatre of this scene of misery. It was hemmed in by black trees which stood up as grim barriers between her and every possibility of succour. She was alone—and alone she must remain, and go through this agony unhelped; before her was the body of him she loved; behind was what she dared not look on—what she could only think of with shuddering horror—a small round fence with one rail snapped in twain. She could just see one portion of it, blue-grey in the cold moonlight. She was chilled with dread.

'My Lewis!' she murmured; 'save me—speak to me, or I shall go mad!'

He seemed to open his eyes. It was no dream—they were open—he was coming to himself again.

'What has happened?' he asked.

'Don't speak,' she replied, though but a moment before her one prayer had been to hear the sound of his voice.

He closed his eyes at her bidding. He was still faint, but she could feel his hand feebly pressing hers, and would have been transcendently happy had it not been for that terrible thing which had so lately come to pass.

'Where is he?' asked Barrington suddenly. 'Tell me—I wish you would tell me what has happened—my head is in great pain.'

'Lie still, dear; I am with you. You shall hear everything when you are a little better.'

'Did I throw him down anywhere? He seemed to fall quite out of sight. Oh, now I remember, he shot me. You are not hurt, are you, Katherine? He did not attack you, I hope, after I had fainted?'

'No; I am well,' said Katherine, with a great effort to control herself.

'But where is he?'

'Gone, gone!' she replied, in a strange voice.

Barrington did not seem satisfied. He tried to raise himself, but found that one arm not only gave him no help, but an infinity of torture.

'My arm is broken, I think,' said he; 'and my head is queer, too.'

She helped him to raise himself, and he sat up for some time, partly supported by her. Then he saw the broken railing, and remembered all.

'Is it quite certain that there is no saving him?' he exclaimed, and in spite of pain struggled to the fatal spot.

'None! Not the least—God forgive us!' she said, in a broken voice. 'That pit is more than a hundred feet deep!'

Supporting himself by the railing, he looked down into the inky black chasm. How could anyone think of hope after beholding that? Then he said solemnly:

'Let us go.'

Day was dawning rapidly, and it was no longer difficult to find their way to the path. They turned away silently, and slowly and painfully descended the bank. He was weak, and his wound very distressing to him; but he would not own it, nor did either of them speak of the torture of mental anguish which weighed both down. When they came to where the paths divided, Katherine took that which led to the road, for she was anxious about Barrington, and wanted to accompany him as far as she could.

'Oh no, I must see you home,' said he; but at that very instant they heard Barbara's voice. 'That relieves me of great anxiety,' said he; 'go to her, and leave me to make my way alone. I am quite able.'

He would take no denial, and with one fervent kiss they parted, after Katherine had entreated him to send her one line in the morning.

'Katherine! Katherine!' exclaimed Barbara, who now came running eagerly towards her. 'My dear Katherine, what an agony I have been in about you! What has happened?' but a glance at Katherine's face put an end to all questions for the present.

Never had she seen anyone look so wretched before. Barbara put

one arm round her, and led her in by the window by which they had left the house. It was now nearly full daylight ; how strange and reproachful familiar objects looked ! Once Barbara spoke ; it was only to say, ' Don't be so anxious ; aunt knows nothing—no one knows anything. If that stupid Wentworth will only hold his tongue, no one need ever know that we have not passed the night quietly in our beds. My dear Katherine, you can't think how often I have been up and down that dene ! I dared not call you. You should not have stayed so long. Where is Wentworth, by-the-bye ?'

' Wait until we are upstairs,' moaned Katherine, ' and then you shall hear all. Oh, how dreadful !'

This exclamation was wrung from her by the sight of the empty bottles and glasses on the dining-room table, which were standing just as Wentworth had left them. The door was open, and Katherine could not help seeing them. Wondering at the condition in which Katherine was, Barbara helped her upstairs ; her dress was torn to shreds, her hands and face wounded with briars. Barbara tried to make her lie down on her bed, but not till she had fully unburdened her mind could the wretched girl obey. What was to be done ? They sat in blank misery, not knowing how to meet the day which was coming on them so fast.

' As soon as the servants are up,' said Barbara at last, ' I will telegraph for Coventry. He will know what to do, and help us. We had better not tell him what has happened until we have seen him. That is the only thing I can think of.'

It was a relief to have formed any plan of conduct.

' Telegraph for Frank Davenport, too,' said Katherine ; ' he must come and take me away.'

' Don't go—don't do that,' said Barbara ; but Katherine again said :

' Send for him—I must see him !'

Her condition was most pitiable. She was completely broken down in mind and body, and lay on the bed, moaning and sobbing as if her heart would break. Barbara darkened the room—it was no place for the garish beams which would intrude. Then she sat down by the bed, sometimes saying a word or two intended to soothe the poor girl whom she pitied so much, but for the most part keeping silence. After some time—whether long or short she knew not—she heard the servants begin to move about. Soon the wretched necessity of seeing them and Mrs. Wilbraham, and of hearing them all wonder where Wentworth was, would be forced on them. As yet no one knew that anything had occurred to make that night which had just gone by—that horrible and never-to-be-forgotten night—at all different from any other.

' Now I am going to send a man off with my telegrams,' said Barbara. ' No one is likely to come to your room while I am away—it's much too early ; but should such a thing occur, remember that we have agreed to say nothing until Coventry comes.'

Katherine murmured an inarticulate assent.

To comfort her a little, Barbara added, 'My messenger shall ride to Donnington—that will cause least talk. I know Coventry is at home—he can be here early in the day.'

Katherine just opened her aching eyes, but that was all. Barbara despatched her telegrams; then, having observed that the servants seemed to stare at the unusual dress she was wearing, she went to her room and dressed herself as usual; and while she was doing that, she heard Mrs. Wilbraham's bell. The sound pierced her like a dagger-thrust. She tried to shake off this feeling, and nerve herself for what lay before her. She, the weakest and most timid person in the house, had to-day to be the strongest. Katherine was still lying in motionless misery; Barbara sat down by her. Twice or thrice she heard her aunt's bell, but though she knew that she ought to go to her, she dared not. At last Mrs. Wilbraham sent for her.

'I have breakfasted in bed, Barbara,' said she, 'because I've had such a bad night. You can't think what a night I have had! You two have had breakfast, I suppose?'

This reminded poor Barbara that they had not; she had never so much as thought of it, and now that the idea was presented to her, it seemed impossible to go downstairs and eat and drink as if nothing had happened, when—but she must not think of that!

'Barbara, dear,' said Mrs. Wilbraham, 'be so kind as to go and knock at Wentworth's door—he is not down, I suppose?—and ask him to come here as soon as he is dressed. Tell him I wish particularly to see him.'

Barbara recoiled almost visibly, and began to tremble violently, but Mrs. Wilbraham was not looking at her.

'Oh no, aunt!' said she; 'don't send me!'

'My dear, don't be absurd! Why should I not send you? Be quick; I shall not be easy till I have seen him!'

Barbara stared in blank terror: her aunt often said that some secret sense revealed to her much that took place, but this was terrible! Mrs. Wilbraham continued:

'It's very odd that a stupid dream should make such a strong impression on one, but I had such a strange dream about the dear boy last night! I dreamt that he was standing by my bedside—just in the very place where you are now.'

Barbara started, and instantly moved to the foot of the bed.

'He looked pale and strange, and said he was going to leave the country. I seemed to feel that he was going, and that it would be of no use for me to beg him not to do it; so I said, "Then kiss me, dear, if you really are going;" but he did not seem able to come any nearer to me. "Then put out your hand and shake hands with me," said I; but he didn't seem able to raise his hand. He stood for some time, and then I seemed to lose sight of him—or else I

awoke with the fright—for I was rather frightened, because all was so strange and uncomfortable. I lay awake for hours after that. Well, it will be a great satisfaction to me to touch his nice warm hand, poor fellow, after that cold, miserable dream ; so go and tell him to come.'

It was all that Barbara could do to restrain herself from such an outburst of grief as would have revealed everything. She clenched her hands tightly together to help her to control herself, and did force herself to go to Wentworth's bedroom door ; but when there, she dared not knock, though she feared her aunt might listen for the sound. Suppose—strange and terrible things did take place sometimes—suppose she heard her knock answered by his voice bidding her enter. She dared not do it. She waited a moment ; then she went back and said that she could get no answer.

'He's asleep, I suppose. Never mind ; you shall go again presently. Now write a note for me. That woman who brought my breakfast—Eliza, or whatever her name is—tells me that a Mr. Barrington is staying at the Wild Hawk. It must be our Mr. Barrington—Katherine's, I mean—and I asked him here. It is very odd of him not to call on me after my invitation, or do something civil of that kind ; but I'll ask him again.'

Barbara had dropped her pen when she heard what she was to do, but she picked it up and wrote a short kind invitation to him.

'Now send it,' said her aunt ; 'and send Egerton to me, and I will get up.'

Barbara sent the note ; and finding breakfast still on the table, took some to Katherine ; but Katherine shook her head, and refused all food. About eleven, Barbara felt that she must go and seek her aunt ; she had never stayed away from her so long before. Mrs. Wilbraham was in the breakfast-room, and said rather fretfully :

'I have been wanting you terribly, Barbara ! Why does everyone keep out of my way ? I have been dressed for nearly an hour, and wanting some one to read to me ; but neither you nor Katherine has come near me ! And where can Wentworth be ? I have been to his room, but he is not there ; and what's more, his bed has not been slept in ! No one seems to have seen him, or to know anything about him ! It is so strange ; for if he is not in the house, where is he ? And then where is Mr. Barrington ?—he is missing too ! My note went to the Wild Hawk ; but the only answer is a message from the landlord to say that Mr. Barrington went out last night about ten o'clock, saying that he should be back before midnight, but never appeared. The landlord sat up for him till after two, but he never came. Now go and tell Katherine to come to me ; she must know I want her.'

'She is ill. She can't come. I never saw anyone with such a headache as she has.'

'Go to her, then, and prepare her for a visit from me.'

Barbara obeyed, glad to be able to warn Katherine that such an ordeal lay before her; but Mrs. Wilbraham began to follow her immediately. On the stairs, however, she met a maid with a note—a shabby-looking note enough—a man had walked from Donnington with it.

‘It’s for Miss Carey,’ said the girl timidly.

But Mrs. Wilbraham was sure she was mistaken, for how could Miss Carey receive notes from Donnington when she did not know a soul in the place? She pounced on it at once; and when she saw the direction, was still more certain that it was for herself, for even without her spectacles she was convinced that this note was from her missing son. With fumbling, anxious fingers she shuffled the envelope off while making her way back to her chair by the breakfast-room fire and her table with the large store of eye-glasses and spectacles. There was but a small fragment of paper inside the envelope, and it was entirely covered with rather illegible writing; but the writing was Wentworth’s, of that Mrs. Wilbraham had no doubt. As she gradually possessed herself of the contents of this letter, she did begin to see that it could not be intended for herself; but so great was her uneasiness about him, that she could not prevail on herself to put it down. She struggled to read onwards:

‘One line to tell you that I am safe. Soon after leaving you in the dene last night, I was picked up and brought to Donnington by a man driving past. I shall try to get on to London. My wound will give me some trouble, but would that were all! His death seems a horrible nightmare! Would to God I had not been the cause of it! The innocent cause truly, but how guilty I feel! Will that good Barbara ever forgive our cruel treatment of her? With love that is yours for ever, yours, and yours only.’

There was no signature. Mrs. Wilbraham was puzzled; interested, too, in the way she most liked. She loved mysteries for their own sake, and this seemed to be one of the first order! What had Wentworth done? She sat with the letter in her hand, wondering and thinking, for more than an hour; for before she read this, quick as she was in seeing things, she had never known that Wentworth loved Katherine, and that Katherine returned his love. It was odd that she had never suspected it. She might have known it from his habit of speaking ill of her; that of course was assumed, for how could anyone dislike Katherine? She might have known it the day before, when that letter from Wentworth—that letter which had evidently come a post too late, and had followed him to Chilworth instead of preceding him—had been given to Katherine and had embarrassed her so much. She might have known it when he sprang up from his seat on the lawn by her side the afternoon before, the very moment that Katherine entered the garden, and ran to her. She was a foolish old woman not to have guessed this secret sooner!

It explained the mystery of the past as nothing else could have explained it. Barbara never could have resisted such a man as Wentworth, if he had made love to her in earnest ; but that he had never done, for the very sufficient reason that he preferred Katherine. Last night had somehow brought matters to a crisis. She sincerely hoped no harm had come to Mr. Barrington. It was a pity she herself had brought him to Chilworth ; he was evidently mixed up in what had taken place somehow, and there was a passage in Wentworth's letter which alarmed her. She would go to Katherine and make her explain all that was difficult to understand. She felt no resentment against Katherine ; whether Wentworth married her or Barbara was a matter of indifference. All that she cared for now was that he should marry one of them ; both were sweet, good girls, whom she dearly loved, and could live with in perfect harmony.

She arose straightway and went to Katherine's room, knocked briskly at the door, and walked in. She had not expected to find a darkened chamber, or Katherine looking so deplorably ill ; but she walked to the bed in a determined manner, and sat down in the chair from which her niece had just arisen. She took Katherine's hand, and then with much decision bade Barbara leave the room.

'I must be alone with Katherine,' said she imperatively. 'There is something which must be said.'

Barbara looked despairingly at Katherine, but there was no help for it ; and making her a sign to be firm and to keep silence, she went.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Wilbraham gravely, 'I have accidentally become possessed of your secret !'

Katherine began to sob convulsively.

'Don't—don't, I entreat you,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'I am not angry with you ! I love you ! The only harm you have done is having kept this so secret. You shall be happy, I promise you ; but first tell me what took place last night. I know a great deal, but tell me everything. I must know everything.'

'I can't,' sobbed Katherine. 'It's too terrible !'

'I know it was terrible. I am prepared for that.'

'It all happened so suddenly, too—that was the awful part of it.'

'Yes, but tell me all, just as it happened.'

'Barbara will tell you—ask Barbara.'

'No ; tell me yourself, dear child—don't be afraid to speak ; besides, I know so much already. You were in the den ?'

'Yes, I was in the den with Mr. Barrington. I did not expect to see him, but he was there ; and Mr. Wilbraham was there too, and followed us—and they quarrelled. I was the cause ; but they quarrelled dreadfully, and struggled, and he pushed him backwards against some railing, and a rail gave way, and he went down—oh, it's too horrible !' cried Katherine—'he went down the pit !'

'And was killed?' said Mrs. Wilbraham, much shocked. She was not prepared for such a tragedy.

'Yes, oh yes—it was one of the deepest pits!'

'And what did you do? What did my poor boy do when he found what had happened?'

'Oh, Mrs. Wilbraham!' shrieked Katherine, when she heard this. 'You are misunderstanding me?'

To Katherine's mind the pronoun *he*, when put in the first place, could only refer to one man—the man whom she loved; but Mrs. Wilbraham applied it with equal certainty to her beloved son, and that had caused this misapprehension.

'No, I am not. I know about it; I understand perfectly. I learnt a good deal from accidentally opening dear Wentworth's letter to you—it came half an hour ago. That told me that something most terrible had happened. It is very bad as it is, very, very bad, and no doubt some lingering regard for your old lover clings to you; but think how much more awful it might have been! You might in one second have been deprived of the man you love, and I of all I hold most dear! We might have lost Wentworth! It would have killed me! I am certain it would have killed me! My love for that boy almost amounts to insanity. I own it!'

Even at this solemn moment, Katherine felt a pang when she learnt how briefly Mrs. Wilbraham would have disposed of the loss of Barrington, had he been the victim; but such feelings were short-lived—the situation was too agonizing.

Some softer thoughts must have come to Mrs. Wilbraham also, for she now said:

'Has this poor Mr. Barrington a mother? If he has, I am sure it would be much kinder if the poor creature were kept in ignorance of what has befallen him; it would be much kinder not to tell her. Why should she ever know? Do you think he has a mother, Katherine?'

'Oh, Mrs. Wilbraham, don't ask me—don't talk to me! You can't imagine what pain you are giving me; I can't bear it! If I could tell you the truth—but I am not to do that!'

'Did he say that you were not? Wicked boy, to doubt my pleasure in his happiness! But I won't ask any more questions,' said Mrs. Wilbraham tenderly, 'I won't indeed! Just let me say this—I know you are not selfish, or thinking of yourself at all now; but you may as well know that I am quite willing to let you marry Wentworth—I am ready to share him with you; and I forgive you for keeping so much secret from me. Here is his letter; I will leave it with you. Only, stay—I must ask you one thing before I go. A wound is mentioned: what does he mean?'

'There was a pistol, and it went off.'

'But he was not badly hurt; he was able to walk away, it seems.'

Katherine could not reply to this; she hid her face in the pillow, and sobbed violently.

'I won't distress you with any more questions, dear,' said Mrs. Wilbraham. 'It is foolish of me to ask that. He was able to write a letter, so he must have been tolerably well. Good-bye—God bless you!'

Mrs. Wilbraham dearly liked prompt action. No sooner had she left Katherine than she rang for Egerton, and ordered her to pack at once; for she was going to pay a visit to her son in Northumberland, and intended to leave home that very afternoon. Then she sent for Barbara, and told her to make ready for departure, and to prepare Katherine to go too.

'It will be better for all of us to get away,' said she decisively. 'Now that I know what has happened, I can't bear the feeling of this place!'

'You know what has happened?' exclaimed Barbara, ready to sink into the earth when she heard these words. 'Oh, my poor dear aunt——'

'Yes, I know what has happened, and I am much shocked! It makes me hate being here—it makes me ill to think of it! Let us get away. Change of scene will help us to forget it; besides, I am sure Wentworth won't come back here for a long time, after last night!'

Barbara was standing behind her aunt. When she heard this, she clutched at the back of a chair to support herself.

'I thought you said you knew all!' she exclaimed. 'What has Katherine told you?'

'Very little! She is in a wretched state, poor girl! You should not have left it to her to tell me; you should have told me everything yourself, as soon as you knew it. That was your duty, but you left me to receive the news by chance. Wentworth's letter was what told me most. Besides discovering from it that he and Katherine are lovers (I hope you are not pained by the discovery, but if you are, it is your own fault), I learnt that some very unfortunate event had taken place last night—Katherine has told me what it was—Mr. Barrington was killed! It is most dreadful! He was killed, and my poor Wentworth wounded in the shoulder. Mr. Barrington, it seems, was desperate; but don't let us speak ill of him. He has received his punishment in this world; may God take that into account! Don't let us speak of this; I can't bear it. I shall be miserable till I have left this place.'

Barbara stood faltering behind her aunt, wondering what she ought to do. If Coventry would but come, he would tell her the truth; she herself dared not.

Mrs. Wilbraham was much too deeply occupied with grave thoughts to observe her niece's silence.

'I have been trying to find out from Katherine if this poor young man had a mother,' said she. 'I think if he has, it would be much better to keep his unhappy end a secret. No one knows it now but

ourselves and Wentworth ; why should anyone else be made unhappy by such knowledge ? What do you think, Barbara ?

Barbara burst into tears.

‘ Ah, you think it wrong to keep it secret, perhaps ? ’ said Mrs. Wilbraham, who imputed her silence to this cause. ‘ Now, for my own part, if I had lost a dear son in such a fearful way, I should look on those who told me of my loss as murderers ; I couldn’t outlive such a piece of intelligence—not that that would signify, though.’

But Barbara had not heard the whole of that speech. She had fled, having found it utterly impossible to listen to another word.

Mrs. Wilbraham insisted on going to Ellerbeck, her son’s Northumberland house, that very afternoon. She was told that Barbara had ventured to telegraph for Coventry, and expected his arrival each minute.

‘ If you ventured to do that, you ventured to take a great liberty ! ’ replied Mrs. Wilbraham. ‘ If he comes after we have gone, he can follow us to Ellerbeck ; if before, he can go with us.’

Being informed that Frank Davenport had been sent for to take Katherine away, she gave a reluctant consent to her paying a short visit to him and Nancy, under a strict promise to return in a week or two ; and having conceded so much, she departed, taking Barbara with her.

The train which took them to Northumberland brought Davenport to Chilworth. His speedy arrival had already been announced by telegram, so they did not grieve so much at leaving Katherine alone.

Davenport and Nancy were at Scarborough, and he had set off for Chilworth directly after Katherine’s telegram had been forwarded from London to him. He saw her—he heard her story ; but put an end to all hope of keeping the events of the past night a secret in a moment, by saying :

‘ You can’t do such a thing—it’s impossible ! You quite forget that the very first thing Barrington will do will be to go before a magistrate and tell the whole story himself ! He must do so—it is his duty ; and the chances are that he has done it already.’

So eager was Katherine to leave the Hall, that they would have gone that very evening had any train that would take them stopped at Chilworth.

Early next morning they began their journey. As they entered the station, Davenport said :

‘ If I did not want so much to take you safely to Nancy, I really think I should run over to Donnington, and see if Barrington got away.’

This roused Katherine from the state of stupor into which she had fallen.

‘ Do go ! ’ said she ; ‘ you ought to do it. I will go to Scarborough alone. Dear Frank, you may trust me. Go to him ! ’

Davenport looked at her in amazement. The moment there was a call on her courage, she cast off the lethargy of grief, and was herself at once.

‘Go to him!’ she again urged. ‘It is of much more importance that you should be with him than with me. Who knows where he is, or how he is?’

‘Who indeed!’ thought Davenport, who from his knowledge of Barrington’s brave and patient way of bearing real suffering, was led to fear much more from the letter which he had sent Katherine than she did.

There was a very short time in which to decide; but the result was that Katherine went to Scarborough alone.

CHAPTER XLI.

‘Here will I stay and end my life with thee,
A life like mine a burden is, I wis.’

CHATTERTON.

‘A hasty portion of prescribed sleep,
Obedient slumbers that can wake or weep,
And sing, and sigh, and work, and sleep again;
Still rolling a round sphere of still returning pain;
Hands full of hearty labours, pains that pay
And prize themselves, do much, that more they may;
And work for work, not wages: let to-morrow’s
New drops wash off the sweat of this day’s sorrows,
A long and daily-dying life which breathes
A respiration of reviving deaths.’

‘I HAVE found him and have brought him here,’ wrote Frank Davenport to Nancy, and his letter was dated from his own house in London. ‘You have no idea what a state he was in or what a risk it seemed to move him! At first I was afraid it would be impossible; but I took the responsibility—for he was in the station-hotel at Donnington, close to a noisy railway-junction, with trains shrieking past almost every five minutes. The journey has done him no harm.

‘Don’t let Katherine make herself miserable. He will do well now that his wound has been looked to. It was much more serious than she supposed, and ought not to have been neglected so long. Ill as he is, he has insisted on making a clear statement of all that happened. Katherine will be called on to do the same—at least, I am afraid so. I feared that the effort of doing this would be too great for him; but I think he has been better since he unburdened his mind.

‘I have put him into our room. I thought he would be better there than in his own. I would ask you to come if Katherine were not with you: but in the state in which he is, the excitement of seeing her might do him much harm. I have a hospital-nurse for

him ; he is doing well, and I am assured that there is not the slightest cause for real uneasiness. I will write every day. Don't let Katherine worry herself.'

Katherine did worry herself. Frank had not intended her to read his letter, but of course she tormented Nancy until she obtained a sight of it, and then tormented herself by imagining that every word in it half-hid and half-revealed a state of things which could only end in misery.

About the middle of the day following, Nancy received this telegram from her husband :

'Come back to London as soon as you receive this, and bring Katherine with you. There is a great change for the worse, and he must see her.'

Neither Katherine nor Nancy knew how they got to London, but punctual to the first minute when they might lawfully have been expected, they stood at the door of the house ; and then they, who for so many hours had been dead to every outward impression, became in a moment keenly alive to the duty of not ringing loud, or letting the sound of their arrival be heard, and forgot themselves, their fears, and their wretchedness for the sake of the man whom they both loved so well.

It was after ten o'clock, and dark—much too dark to see the face of the servant who came to let them in. Nancy wanted to say, 'How is he?' but the words died away on her lips ; Katherine was only able to raise her agonized eyes to the girl's, in a vain attempt to learn something from them. Frank, however, came in a moment, and promptly relieved them by saying :

'He is rather better—he is much better. He knows you are coming, and is delighted. You shall go to him as soon as you have rested a minute or two, and have had something to eat.'

His manner was so comforting, that the girls at once yielded to the strong desire both felt to indulge in a flood of tears. They told him not to mind this—that it did them good.

'Go upstairs together,' said he, after a while. 'I will stay here. He can't bear so many of us at once.'

'Before I go, dear Frank,' said Katherine earnestly, 'do tell me how much hope there is ?'

Frank's face changed in a moment ; her manner enforced sincerity. His cheerfulness vanished—it had only been assumed.

'I don't know,' he answered, and they could see that his eyes filled with tears.

Katherine seemed faint, and clung to Nancy.

'Don't go till you feel stronger,' said Frank. 'I beg you to remember that it is of the utmost importance to keep him quiet. Can you control yourself, do you think, Katherine ?'

Katherine rose up to her full height in a moment, and said :

'Have no fear;' then she walked upstairs, not so much as once supporting herself against the hand-rail of the stairs. She paused a while at the door, and then knocked very softly. The nurse came. Katherine caught a glimpse of the white bed, and of the gold dolphins at the foot of it, gleaming in the mellow lamplight, and the remembrance of that day when she had stood to Frank for her portrait came back on her with sudden and overwhelming force. How many months of anguish parted her from that day! The Katherine who had stood there then was dead and buried. With a quick contraction of the heart she shuddered at the thought of the long-forgotten and remote past, and then walked into the room. He was lying with closed eyes, breathing painfully. He did not seem to hear her enter, and did not open his eyes.

'He's not asleep, ma'am,' said the nurse; 'but he'll not notice you; you need not be so afraid of disturbing him.'

Katherine tried to check her. This treating the sick man as if he were already outside the range of ordinary circumspection, was such a painful evidence of what her opinion of his condition was. She knelt down by the bed, and seeing one of his hands lying on the counterpane, gently took it in her own. He seemed at once to know the touch of her soft caressing fingers, for his hand closed on hers, and a fleeting smile passed over his lips. It was gone in a moment, but it repaid her for a great deal of suffering. The nurse had no appreciation of these delicate methods of arriving at a mutual understanding.

'You think he doesn't know what is going on, and is in a sort of stupor,' said she; 'but you will see that he does if you talk to him; don't be so afraid.'

If anger could have been felt at such a moment, Katherine felt it then.

'Lewis,' she said, 'Lewis dear, do you know who is with you?'

A pressure of the hand—a very slight one—was the answer. Katherine rejoiced in it; but the nurse thought that words ought to have been given in answer to words, and said in a rather strident voice: 'Look up, sir; open your eyes. You don't know what a sweet pretty lady has come to help me to take good care of you.'

Nancy had followed Katherine into the room. She now came forward and said:

'Nurse, we will leave them alone for a few minutes. They may wish to say something to each other.'

When they were alone, Katherine kissed the poor helpless hand she held, and said:

'Lewis, I am here. I have come to be with you while you are so ill. Can you tell me how you are?'

'Ill,' he said, 'but better since you came. Pray that I may not be taken far away from you, and your love. You do love me, Katherine?'

'Love you?' she repeated almost reproachfully; 'yes, indeed I love you! Can you tell me how you are?'

'How am I to know, dear, when all is pain! You would have married me, wouldn't you, if I had lived?'

She could not answer this question immediately, it was put in such a terrible form.

'You would have been my wife?' he again said earnestly.

'I am your wife,' said she; 'whatever happens, I can love no one but you till I die. But, dear Lewis, get well.'

'Ah,' said he, speaking with much difficulty, 'if I could!—but I am so happy!'

His strength seemed exhausted, and she felt that she had done wrong to let him say so much. She kept silence now, but stayed where she was, with his hand locked in hers, praying for mercy and pity. Once or twice he opened his eyes again, and to her delight she perceived a faint gleam of pleasure pass over them when he saw that she was still there; it was transient, however, and his weary eyelids closed again at once—perhaps in exhaustion, but she hoped in sleep. The long night wore on, and still Katherine sat by his side. Sometimes the nurse came and gave him food or medicine, but without rousing him. About four in the morning he looked up as if refreshed and stronger, and said:

'There is nothing like an illness of this kind for clearing a man's vision with regard to his past life! What a selfish wretch I have been! Self-will and selfishness bring their own punishment with them. I thought I had a right to have all I coveted!'

'Our fault was that we both wanted to be happy when it was not right that we should be so; we would neither be guided by others, nor wait.'

'It was worse than that—much worse on my part! I turned my back on duty and honour! I ought to have been ashamed to look your father and mother in the face; and you, poor Katherine, you were so young!'

'Not too young to know I was doing wrong.'

'You——'

'Don't let us talk of it now; we were both wrong—wrong then, I mean, for there is no harm in loving each other now.'

'Now,' said he bitterly—'now it is too late!'

Katherine looked at him in terror; for the first time since she had entered the room, she began to see that his recovery was perhaps hopeless. She gazed piteously in his pallid face, but could not speak. Hearing that they were now silent, Nancy and the nurse crept into the room, and presently Frank followed. Katherine knew that they were there, but her heart was full of desire to hear some words on which she could dwell in hope.

'Not too late!' she said; 'Lewis, don't say that! You will get well.'

'The doctor says not,' was his answer ; 'not in so many words, but I can see what he means.'

In her misery she turned and looked from Nancy to Frank, and from Frank to the nurse ; and her face said plainly, 'Give me some hope ; say he is alarming me without a cause.'

One and all they met her gaze, looked at her compassionately, and then turned away, unable to endure the sight of anguish which they could not honestly do anything to lessen. She laid her face on the bed, resolved to suffer in silence ; but very soon Nancy, who was afraid that her self-command might desert her, led her gently from the room.

'My darling,' said she, 'you are doing him harm ; you are better away from him ; both Frank and the nurse say so too. You let him talk on exciting subjects.'

'I will not go into his room until you give me permission,' replied Katherine submissively. 'I will sit here, and you will come often and tell me how he is.'

'What does the doctor say ?' she inquired some hours later, after that gentleman had paid his visit.

'He is not so well—he is weaker.'

'You do not think it is really certain that he must die ?'

Nancy recoiled ; how could Katherine speak so calmly.

'Certain, no ! Until yesterday the doctor thought he would recover.'

'And now, what does he say ?'

'That little short of a miracle can save him.'

'But why should that miracle not take place ? You seem to have given up hope, and that is so wrong ! He will recover—I know he will—I feel it ! It is impossible that he can die ! Only don't let him see that you have no hope—you destroy the very mainspring of recovery ! It is madness ! I don't know what the doctor does, but both you and Frank let Lewis see that you do not expect him to get well, and so does that nurse ! Go to him at once, and tell him that the doctor says he is much better !'

'But unhappily he did not,' replied Nancy drearily ; 'he told me he was worse, and I am afraid it is true.'

'That's of no consequence ; we must keep up his spirits.'

'Well, I'll do my best.'

'May I go ?' asked Katherine ; 'let me do it. If you did go and say something hopeful, he would not believe you, if you looked like that.'

She was so certain that they were all injuring their patient's chance of recovery, that she at once went to his room, and with much cheerfulness proclaimed the delight she had felt on hearing that the doctor thought him so much better.

'And you feel better, don't you, dear ?' she added.

'Not much,' he replied ; nevertheless, for a minute or so he looked pleased at the intelligence she had brought him.

She prevailed on Frank and Nancy to take the same line—the nurse had never been so gloomy as they, and the doctor had been occasionally even reassuring. Even he, however, was urged by Katherine to do more to try to raise his patient's spirits.

'The doctor says that Lewis is much better,' said Nancy, the day following.

Poor Katherine dared not enjoy the news, for she feared that the doctor was only acting a part, in obedience to her own request. She sat alone for hours, wondering whether there was indeed room for hope. That same day she had to face another trial. She was summoned to give evidence at the coroner's inquest on the body of Wentworth Wilbraham. This was a terrible shock to her; but it was absolutely necessary that she should go.

Davenport went with her to Donnington that evening, supported her during the inquiry; and that over, returned to London with her at once, in trembling anxiety as to what news would greet them when they reached home.

'The doctor says he is better,' was Nancy's salutation.

Katherine kept out of the sick-room, and had no means of testing the truth of this encouraging report. Again she was afraid it was but part of the assumed cheerfulness recommended by herself.

'The doctor seems to think that we have gained another step,' was Nancy's report next day; and she wondered why Katherine did not seem more elated.

So it went on for nearly a week. Barrington really was a little better, but Katherine had said so much to all around him about the duty of taking cheerful views, that she no longer believed in cheerful words.

After this he had a relapse, and three dreadful days followed, during which his life hung by a thread; and those who so dearly loved him passed each other by in silence, knowing that they had no comfort to give. It was a time of utter misery. There he lay, looking like a beautiful white marble statue; and Katherine sat by his side, hardly more alive than he.

On the fourth morning, she, who had been there nearly the whole of the night, was still in the same place. She had fallen into an uneasy slumber, from which she was aroused by the arrival of the doctor.

She tried to leave the room, but her limbs failed her. What passed during the doctor's visit she knew not; she was weary with watching and stupefied with grief.

At the last she became aware that he was endeavouring to say some words of encouragement and comfort to her. To her they could bring no comfort. She had entreated him never to omit to say such words. He saw how void of hope her heart was, and took her by the arm and led her out of the room, and across the landing to her own.

‘Can you bear good news?’ said he. ‘I want to tell you that, humanly speaking, all danger is over!’

She reeled, and would have fallen, had he not supported her—that was exactly what he had expected her to do.

* * * * *

‘Who would have thought that we could ever be so happy again?’ exclaimed Nancy joyously.

It was just a fortnight after Barrington had been pronounced out of danger, and since that time he had made rapid progress towards perfect health; and though poor Katherine was still feeling the effects of the mental and physical suffering she had undergone, and lying in a state of languor and weakness on the sofa in Nancy’s drawing-room, she was exuberantly happy, for Barrington was all but himself again, and she could see and speak to him, without feeling that she was doing wrong to enjoy that delight.

How could she be unhappy? No hour passed without her receiving a visit from one or other of the three persons whom she best loved on earth. She basked in the pleasure of being with them, and was almost too weak to have a thought of anything which occurred beyond the limits of the four walls which shut in what was now her world. It was a world of four very happy people, for now Frank was prosperous, and Nancy’s health restored.

‘Can you bear to be happier still, Katherine?’ continued Nancy gaily. ‘Would you like to hear some very good news?’

‘Of course I should,’ said Katherine.

‘Of course you would!’ re-echoed Nancy. ‘I told Lewis so; but he was afraid you were not strong enough. I was sure that was nonsense! Good news ought not to hurt anyone. Did you hear the postman’s knock a while ago? That was a letter offering Lewis a good appointment! He is to be secretary to Mr. Greville!’

Mr. Greville was one of Her Majesty’s Ministers.

Katherine looked surprised, but nothing more; in her present state of perfect, though languid happiness, she found it difficult to believe in any change being for the better.

‘Don’t you see what a splendid thing it is? It gives him money, and position, and all kinds of good things; and now you can marry, and live very happily ever after!’

Katherine smiled, and did not gainsay her. She had not a tie in the world! No one had any claim on her but poor Mrs. Wilbraham, and it was quite certain that Mrs. Wilbraham would never wish to see her again now that she must have learnt the truth.

‘Katherine, if Lewis asks you to marry him in a week or two, I hope you won’t make any difficulty,’ said Nancy earnestly.

‘I? No; why should I, dear? Of course I’ll marry him.’

‘How sensibly you take it! He was afraid to tell his good news too suddenly, and I was afraid of your making difficulties about

marrying him. Katherine, you have treated that poor man terribly !

‘Yes, dear, I know ; but all that is over. I have promised to marry him, and I will marry him. Even if I wanted to break my word, which I don’t, I have no one to go to but Lewis. Poor Mrs. Wilbraham must hate me now ! I cannot bear to think of it ! You see, they do not even write to me ! Barbara might write. I do so want to know how Mrs. Wilbraham bore the discovery ! Nancy, will you ask Barbara to write to me ? Say I am most anxious to hear—that I can’t sleep at night for thinking of them, and yet can’t bring myself to write !’

‘I’ll tell you the truth,’ said Nancy ; ‘Barbara has written twice to you, but I have not dared to give you her letters, and she has written once to me. Mrs. Wilbraham has been ill—very ill indeed. Barbara’s letter is a sad one.’

‘Read it to me ; do get it at once ?’

‘But can you bear it ?’

‘I can bear anything,’ replied Katherine. So Nancy read this letter :

‘I am so grieved to hear of dear Katherine’s anxiety and illness. I entreat you to write to me again as soon as you can, and trust you will have good news to tell me. You did quite right not to give her my letters. My aunt has been very ill, also. She has had an attack of paralysis, and we fear that the distress of the last few weeks has caused it. She is better, but not what she was, and we are afraid she never will be. Coventry says that under the circumstances, and considering that another seizure is almost certain to be fatal, she must never know that Wentworth is dead. She deceived herself about it at the beginning—it was not our doing then ; but now he thinks it would be both cruel and dangerous to let her know that it was not Mr. Barrington who was killed, but her own son. Her life cannot be a long one—why should we either shorten it, or make it entirely wretched ? She lives so much alone that the truth can easily be kept from her. I intend to devote myself to her, and guard her from the painful knowledge. Coventry says that as Wentworth had no property of any kind to leave behind him, and was entirely dependent on his mother, there will be no legal formalities to go through—I mean none of which she must of necessity be cognizant which would compel us to inform her of the real facts of the case. Besides, her late illness simplifies everything, and the doctor would help us. I agree with Coventry, and feel that to tell her the truth would be tantamount to killing her. What do you think ? My life, dear Nancy, is just now a very hard one—hard so far as my relations with my poor aunt are concerned, but not otherwise. My cousin Coventry wants me to marry him. I have consented, but my aunt is so strange and difficult about it. She will neither live with us here at Eilerbeck, nor yet allow us to live at

Chilworth with her. She says that Wentworth will never return to Chilworth if Coventry is there, and that she wants Wentworth to marry Katherine and live there with her. To us, who unhappily know that neither of them ever can live there with her, it is most painful to hear this said ; and it is most painful, too, to me to discover how little my aunt cares for me. She told Coventry that even before Katherine began to be attached to Wentworth, she loved her better than she had ever loved me—that Katherine suited her better in every way. She tells me that I may marry Coventry, or do what I like, so long as Katherine is with her. Katherine, she says, is beloved by Wentworth, and that is everything to her. Do not distress dear Katherine by telling her all this. I know that it would be impossible for her ever to return to Chilworth. How could she endure it, after what has happened? And yet aunt is counting on having her. She says that she and Katherine will go there and “wait patiently until dear Wentworth has so far forgotten the horror of the past, as to be able to bear the sight of the place.” Do you not pity my poor aunt, and me too? When I hear her speak in this way, I feel that she ought to be told the truth ; and yet neither I nor anyone else dare do what is equivalent to killing her. I am convinced that she would die if she knew that Wentworth was dead. A strange life lies before me! I must not marry Coventry during my aunt’s lifetime ; I can never forsake her, and yet my unhappiness will not make her happiness——

‘Here I was interrupted,’ continued Barbara. ‘Aunt wanted me about something. What do you think she had been doing while I was away from her, writing to you? She had made the servant take down one of the pictures your husband painted from Katherine two years ago—you remember it, of course. She had had it taken down from the wall, and placed on the ground before her, and was sitting with all her spectacles on at once, gazing so earnestly at it. Poor thing ! I was quite sorry for her, for I don’t think she could see much of it ; but she said she did, and that the sight made her happy ! She is very fond of Katherine. Would that things had been different, and that dear Katherine could have stayed with her !’

‘Katherine will stay with her!’ was Katherine’s remark, as she quietly folded the letter and gave it back to Nancy.

Nancy looked up in utter amazement. Katherine’s words signified so much, yet her manner was so calm.

‘It is my duty,’ said Katherine ; ‘she loves me. She will be miserable if I don’t go to her. She could never get anyone to stay with her before I went, and it will be worse now.’

‘You don’t mean to say that you can think of going away, just when everything is going to be so happy?’

‘I must—I ought to go!’ replied Katherine courageously, but her face had turned very white.

'Lewis will never consent to it!' exclaimed Nancy vehemently. 'It is a horrible idea! You can't behave so ill to him!'

'Lewis will feel as I do.'

'Lewis will do nothing of the kind!' said Nancy; and lest Katherine should harden herself in this resolution and commit herself to returning to Chilworth before she heard all that was to be urged on the other side, Nancy hurried away to bring him.

He entered the room precipitately, and knelt down by Katherine's sofa. He was bending forward to kiss her, when he was checked by the expression in her eyes. It was the look of one nerving herself for martyrdom. She was no longer the Katherine who was so soon to be his wife—no longer the rose he was to wear on his heart, and whose beauty was to be a rapture to him; but a lily which was to be set apart on some cold and lonely altar, and only worshipped from afar. A sudden chill fell upon him—the pain of separation had begun.

'My Katherine,' said he tenderly, 'you won't really do this?'

He could not take his eyes from her face as he waited for her answer with such sorrowful eagerness; but his hand sought for hers, and having found it, he held it in a grasp which seemed to say, 'Never will I let you go.'

'Lewis,' she pleaded faintly, 'be merciful; don't try to stop me.'

'I must stop you! The idea is monstrous! How could you doom yourself to such a life?'

'Don't you think it is my duty? We are young—we can love each other and wait; knowing we love each other will always make us happy. Mrs. Wilbraham has lost the son she most loved. She is old, blind, alone, and ill. You can see that Barbara is nothing to her, and no servants will stay in the house. I must go, for I know that I can make her happy. We owe this to her. Don't try to weaken me—I am weak enough already. Think it over, and then I am sure you will feel as I do. Besides, there is another reason—it will be impossible to keep the knowledge of Wentworth's terrible death from her if she is to have a succession of strange servants about her!'

He began to pace up and down the room; his face was full of trouble. Katherine could not bear to see it. She was far from being so strong as she wished to appear. She stole away to hide the pain and grief she felt.

He was afraid that she was right. He knew she was right! For days and nights he had hovered on the very brink of the life which is hereafter. In pain and anguish he had threaded the dark and ever-narrowing passage which leads down to the grave; and one by one, as he went, the worldly ideas and selfish reasonings which in the days of his health and strength had obscured his judgment of his own conduct had fallen away as powerless to screen or excuse him. Now he knew how selfishly, dishonourably, and cruelly he

had behaved ; but, in spite of everything, he had gained the love of this high-minded, noble girl. There had been a time when he had been able to persuade her to do things which she knew to be wrong ; now that would be impossible, and to keep her love he must keep her respect. But his own conscience now told him that she was right ; his self-respect also demanded that the sacrifice should be made. And yet it was so hard to lose sight of her again, even though the separation could not be for long.

He left the house and walked about the streets till late in the afternoon. When he went home again, his answer would have to be given. When he did go, Nancy was the one who saw him first.

‘Well, Lewis?’ she asked anxiously.

He looked grave, but said, as he passed onward to find Katherine : ‘Katherine is right ; Mrs. Wilbraham ought to be considered.’

‘I don’t agree with you!’ said Nancy angrily. ‘Well, all I can say is that it is a great blessing that everyone says that tiresome old woman can’t live more than a year!’ But Barrington was gone, and did not hear this exclamation.

Katherine returned to Chilworth. She has been there one year. Her health, her strength, and her time are all unhesitatingly yielded up to the absolute disposal of Mrs. Wilbraham. Mrs. Wilbraham is perfectly happy. She can talk to her companion of her dear son Wentworth—of her sorrow at being deprived of his presence—of her longing to have him back. She could not do this to anyone else ; but she is convinced that Katherine loves him, and Katherine never undeceives her. She listens to assurances of the bliss which awaits her when dear Wentworth comes home and marries her. She listens even with calmness to the scanty meed of regret which is occasionally accorded to Barrington’s untimely and disastrous death. She spends hours in the, to her, now most painful occupation of marking second-hand books for purchase, and going carefully through catalogue after catalogue for this purpose. She does it, though the books are never really ordered, and though this was one of the things which she did on that fatal day which she would give so much to be able to forget for ever, and which this dreary occupation brings back so vividly to her mind. To Mrs. Wilbraham, it brings nothing but pleasure. Katherine reads aloud for several hours daily, but she cannot read everything ; and it is a delight to the poor old lady to have the names of many a favourite book, which would otherwise be forgotten, thus brought back to her treacherous and fast-failing memory. So Katherine sits, pencil in hand, marking books and listening to Mrs. Wilbraham’s cherished recollections of some of them. There are times when she is very glad of these digressions—days when she is so overtired in body and mind, that in spite of herself, her eyes fill with tears. Her eyes may be brimful of blinding tears, but tender and patient words are always on her lips.

After six months or so, Barbara married Coventry.

‘I don’t miss her!’ said Mrs. Wilbraham to Katherine. ‘How could I, when I have you, my darling? The greatest regret of my life is that I did not get to know you years before! You are the comfort and joy of my life, and will be the blessing of my son’s.’

Mrs. Wilbraham never seemed to wonder why Wentworth did not come home. She was so sensitive on some points herself, that she could readily imagine that he would for many a long day have a horror of the place. As for his not writing, she believed that he wrote to Katherine; and for the sake of the great love she bore her, tried not to feel jealous.

‘You will tell me if he says anything about coming back,’ said she. ‘I see you don’t like to read his letters to me. I don’t expect you to do it, dear; I know love-letters are sacred.’

Katherine was obliged to let this pass. Once or twice Mrs. Wilbraham said:

‘The next time you write to Wentworth, tell him to write to me sometimes—don’t say too much about it, though, for I am not jealous of you.’

And this, too, Katherine was obliged to let pass. Having once allowed the unhappy lady to believe that her son was still alive, it was now impossible to undeceive her. But gradually she has let Wentworth drop more and more out of her thoughts. Her mind was weakened by her illness, and it has ceased to dwell on anything but the trivial and constantly recurring events of her daily life. A round of small occupations fills her mind—love of Katherine fills her heart. Katherine is not wholly unhappy. She loves and is beloved by one dearer to her than life. Twice or thrice a week the postman brings her a letter, which is one of the main supports of her existence; but the chiefest of these is the knowledge that she has not shrunk away from what she knew to be a duty. She is now two-and-twenty, but is a thousand times more beautiful than she was in her first youth. Few see her beauty, but sometimes a carriage drives through the steep old streets of Donnington, and foot-passengers suddenly find their eyes riveted to a face which seems more noble than they have ever yet beheld. For a minute or so, as the carriage climbs a difficult, ill-paved hill, they gaze into eyes steeped in sorrowful memories, but full of tender love and pity, and they find themselves saying with a sigh: ‘How beautiful! What a sad history is there, if we did but know it!’

THE END.

MARIE ANTOINETTE ON THE EVE OF HER EXECUTION.

"All hope of Succour, but from Thee, is lost."



(SEE NEXT PAGE).

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